

THE LIFE OF
CATHERINE THE GREAT
OF RUSSIA
E-A-BRAYLEY HODGETTS



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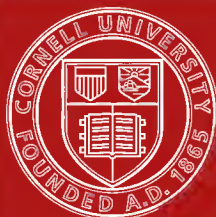
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**THE LIFE OF CATHERINE THE GREAT
OF RUSSIA**



CATHERINE II

FROM AN ENGRAVING IN THE POSSESSION OF THE AUTHOR

**THE LIFE OF
CATHERINE THE GREAT
OF RUSSIA**

BY
E. A. BRAYLEY HODGETTS

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

**NEW YORK
BRENTANO'S
1914**

PREFACE

THE author feels that no apology is needed for the popular account of the life and character of the Empress Catherine which he has endeavoured to give in these pages. Lives of Catherine have been many, but none can be said to have presented a really dispassionate picture of that great ruler's character and reign.

This the author has attempted; where he has failed he must plead the reader's indulgence. He has endeavoured, wherever possible, to let the Empress speak for herself from her own letters, and where this was not feasible he has reproduced the words of contemporary diplomatists and other competent persons.

Some of the slanders on Catherine have been carefully examined and found to be contrary to fact. Her warlike achievements have been judged to be too well known to need a detailed recapitulation. It is to the more intimate sides of her intellectual life that most prominence has been given.

The author has been greatly aided in his endeavour to be impartial by the works of the Russian historians, Bilbassoff and Brückner, and the publications of the Imperial Russian Historical Society.

His thanks are due to Baron Dimsdale for permission to reproduce the interesting portrait of the first Baron.

E. A. B. H.

LONDON, 1914

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. CHILDHOOD	1
II. THE COURT OF ST. PETERSBURG	16
III. THE PERIOD OF PROBATION.	36
IV. THE GRAND-DUKE	55
V. MARRIAGE	67
VI. IN DISGRACE	82
VII. BIRTH OF PAUL	102
VIII. COUNT STANISLAUS PONIATOVSKI	117
IX. DEATH OF ELIZABETH	132
X. REIGN OF PETER III	145
XI. ACCESSION	161
XII. THE DEBUT	177
XIII. THE ORLOFFS.	192
XIV. IVAN III	211
XV. POLAND AND TURKEY	225
XVI. BARON DIMSDALE	237
XVII. POUGATCHEFF.	250
XVIII. POTEKIN AND THE FAVOURITES	265
XIX. FOREIGN AFFAIRS	279
XX. AMONG THE PHILOSOPHERS	291
XXI. MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER	306
XXII. THE END	318
INDEX	333

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CATHERINE II	<i>Frontispiece</i>
From an Engraving in the possession of the author	
	FACING PAGE
THE EMPRESS ELIZABETH	26
PRINCES SOPHIA OF ANHALT-ZERBST	36
PETER III	58
THE GRAND-DUKE PAUL	112
THE GRAND-DUCHESS CATHERINE	122
INTERIOR OF KAZAN CATHEDRAL	156
THE EMPRESS CATHERINE	176
GREGORY ORLOFF	194
BARON DIMSDALE	238
From a Russian Engraving in the possession of the present Baron	
POUGATCHEFF CAPTURED AND IN HIS CAGE	254
POTEMKIN	266
PLATON ZUBOFF	276
THE GRAND-DUCHESS ALEXANDRA	288
DIDEROT	300
THE EMPRESS CATHERINE IN 1794	324

THE LIFE OF CATHERINE THE GREAT OF RUSSIA

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD

PRINCESS SOPHIA of Anhalt-Zerbst, later to be known to the world as the Empress Catherine II of Russia, the Semiramis of the North, was born in Stettin on the 2nd May 1729. From the very first, calumny and scandal seem to have enveloped the history of this singularly gifted princess, as much sinned against as sinning. Doubt has even been cast on her parentage. Several obscure eighteenth-century writers have stated authoritatively that she was the daughter, not of her reputed father, Prince Christian Augustus of Anhalt-Zerbst, but of a very handsome and accomplished Russian diplomatist, Betzkoy by name, who, according to some, sojourned for a brief but happy period at Stettin during the year before Catherine's birth, whilst others would have it that the romantic episode took place in Paris, on the occasion of the Princess's alleged visit to that capital, when Betzkoy was attached to the Russian Embassy. The scandal was based on the favour the Empress Catherine graciously bestowed upon Betzkoy in later life in St. Petersburg, and the indulgence with which she tolerated his whims and caprices. But Catherine was indulgent and gracious to most people. A more far-fetched and ridiculous story made her out to be the natural daughter of Frederick the Great, who was barely seventeen at the time of her birth. Not content with disputing her parentage, the scandal-mongers have disputed her birthplace, and even refused to believe in her having

been baptized, because no record of the performance of this rite can be traced in the parish registers of the various places in which she is supposed to have been born. The controversy has at last been finally settled by the publication of a letter, written by the Prince, announcing her birth, and by the discovery that he christened her himself.

Prince Christian Augustus of Anhalt-Zerbst was the scion of a proud but insignificant princely house which had been split up into eight impoverished branches and had, throughout its history of two centuries, produced no distinguished offspring. Humdrum, honest princelings, its sons had for the most part spent their youth fighting for their living in the train of more powerful princes than they, marrying later German princesses in their own modest station in life, and as obscure as themselves, to settle down later and end their days in their ancestral castles on the straitened resources which a none too prodigal fortune had permitted them to retain.

The husband of Catherine's mother, for, as we have seen, the *chronique scandaleuse* disputes his title to be called Catherine's father, was a Major-General in the Prussian Army, thirty-seven years of age, and commanding the 8th (Zerbst) Regiment of Infantry at Stettin when he married the sixteen-year-old Princess Johanna Elizabeth of Holstein-Gottorp. She was the youngest sister of the handsome Prince Charles Augustus of that ilk, the affianced husband of Princess Elizabeth of Russia, whom he did not live to marry, thereby being no doubt saved much trouble.

Princess Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, who was never publicly married, but was lavish in her favours, later ascended the Russian throne, by a *coup de main* and through a palace revolution, at the head of the Imperial Guards, nearly all of whom were reported to have been her paramours. This truly remarkable woman remained, in sentiment at least, as we shall presently see, faithful to the memory of her betrothed.

The birth of Sophia was a source of disappointment to her father, whose pride of race had led him to hope for a son. He did not think it necessary to make to the Russian Court an official announcement of her arrival. The town of Stettin had belonged to Prussia since 1720 only, and the princely commander of the 8th

Regiment had taken up his residence in a private house in the Domstrasse where the room in which the "Great Empress" first saw the light used to be proudly shown. The cradle of the infant Princess is still treasured at Weimar. She was christened Sophia Augusta Frederika, in honour of her distinguished aunts.

Later, when the Prince was made commandant of the fortress and governor of the town, he took up his abode in the old castle of Stettin, and here "Figgey," for such was her pet name, was educated under the eye of her mother. Princess Johanna Elizabeth was a bright, clever, and ambitious woman who brought up her daughter strictly and simply. Figgey played with the children of the townspeople, was never called by her title, and was shown no special deference on account of her rank. Nevertheless, in later life her playfellows recalled that she was from her earliest years of an imperious disposition and inclined to dictate to her playmates and take the lead. She early manifested the characteristics of the tom-boy and a partiality for boyish sports; among other things, she was fond of shooting. Countess Mellin, one of her playmates, has left us a portrait of the child as she appeared to her: "She was well-proportioned, from infancy she had always possessed a distinguished bearing, and she was tall for her age. Her cast of countenance was not beautiful but very pleasant, her frank and open glance and amiable smile made her whole face most attractive. She was educated by her mother, who brought her up very strictly, and repressed the slightest exhibition of pride, to which the child was however extremely prone. The mother, for instance, made her kiss the hem of the garments of distinguished lady-visitors to the house."

Perhaps it was fortunate that this severe parent was compelled to devote less and less time to her eldest daughter, on account of the claims of her four other children, three of whom were sickly and needed constant care. Moreover, the Princess was pleasure-loving and fond of society. Figgey was thus saved from the contagion of some of the least lovable of her mother's characteristics, such as covetousness and jealousy of others, a passion for intrigue, backbiting, scandal-mongering, and, generally, envy, hatred, and malice, to which the generous nature of the young Princess was ever a stranger.

At that time Prussia was overrun by French emigrants,

attracted by the hospitality of the Prussian King, and expatriated by the fanaticism of their own. The young Princess, in common with others of her rank, therefore early enjoyed the benefit of a French governess; this was, in her case, Mademoiselle Cardel, an amusing and intelligent person who had the great masters of French literature at her finger-ends and introduced her pupil to the creations of Racine, Corneille, and, more especially, Molière. Of Wagner and other tutors the Princess later wrote that they were stupid and tiresome pedants, nevertheless she cherished a certain gratitude towards Wagner, to whom in after years she once sent a thousand ducats from St. Petersburg. Although she proved an apt scholar in most subjects, in music she made no progress, and a failure to appreciate its beauties continued her mental defect to the end of her days, to the scorn and derision of her numerous detractors and slanderers. Catherine has herself recorded how she used to listen with the greatest attention and interest to the conversation of her instructors and to their religious dissertations, putting her own interpretation on their views and teachings, which, however, she invariably concealed from them, thus developing at an early age that remarkable discretion and self-repression by means of which she was enabled later to play so difficult and so great a part. Mlle Cardel, however, may be excused for describing the child as obstinate and stubborn and an "*esprit gauche*."

In her own *Mémoires*, published by Herzen in the mid-nineteenth century, Catherine is made to say :

"I saw Peter III for the first time in 1739, when he was eleven years old, at Eutin at his guardian's, the Prince Bishop of Lübeck, a few months after the death of his father, Duke Charles Frederick. The Prince Bishop had collected all his family in order to present his ward to them. My grandmother, the mother of the Prince Bishop, and my mother, his sister, had come to Hamburg for this purpose with me, who was then ten years of age. Prince Augustus and Princess Anne, the brother and sister of the princely guardian and regents of Holstein, were also present. On this occasion I heard talk, in the family circle, of the young Duke's love of drink and the difficulty his entourage had in preventing him from getting drunk at table. He was reported to be obstinate and irascible and to dislike the people

by whom he was surrounded." She describes him as sickly and very pale, extraordinarily thin and of a weak constitution.

Next year, in 1740, she was again taken to Hamburg to stay with her grandmother, the widow of the Bishop of Lübeck, where von Brümmer, the hated tutor of Peter III, gave her books to read. It was here that Count Gyllenborg reproached her mother for having so poor an opinion of her daughter, and told her that the shrewd and sharp-eared little Princess was possessed of intelligence beyond her years, a statement which seems to have made a deep and agreeable impression on Figgey.

Brunswick was often visited, and here Pastor Dove gave her religious instruction. The Dowager Duchess Elizabeth Sophia Maria of Wolfenbüttel, who was in residence there, was also of the house of Holstein, and had been the guardian of Figgey's mother. It was here, in 1742 or 1743, that one of the canons of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Corbri, who had studied fortune-telling and palmistry, which, by the way, is forbidden by that Church, told Figgey's mother, in the child's presence, that he could see at least three crowns on the little girl's forehead. The mother treated this as a joke, but he adjured her not to doubt what he had said, and led her to a window, where, as she subsequently stated to her daughter, he told her marvellous things about which she even forbade him to speak, adding to her daughter that the canon's prophecies would be fulfilled.

The young Princess frequently visited Zerbst, where the famous portrait by Anna Rosina Liscewska was painted. She was of course present at the festivities of 1743 on the occasion of her uncle's accession to the dignity of reigning prince. This Prince John Louis was the brother of Christian Augustus.

The Princess also went to Berlin, whither her father's military duties often called him, and where her mother generally spent Christmas. Here she saw Frederick II, who had not yet become the hero of the Seven Years War, nor was she old enough to understand or appreciate her future peer among monarchs.

With the exception of these unimportant visits, the young Princess spent the whole of her childhood either at the ancestral castle of Zerbst or else at Stettin, in the Pomeranian fortress, in the trenches of which she planted a linden tree in 1740 which subsequently became famous as the *Kaiserlinde*.

It will thus be seen that the early years and education of the future Empress of Russia were uneventful and ordinary; as she herself wrote later: "Mlle Cardel was not able to teach me much. She was an old Frenchwoman who gave me an education suitable for the wife of any of our neighbours."

Baroness von Prinzen, speaking of the young Princess, said: "Princess Sophia was born, grew up, and was educated before my eyes; I witnessed her studies and her progress; I myself assisted her in the packing of her luggage before her departure for Russia. I enjoyed her confidence sufficiently to imagine that I knew her better than did anybody else, nevertheless I never guessed that she was destined to attain the fame she achieved. In the time of her youth all I remarked in her was her serious turn of mind, which was cold and calculating and as far removed from being in any way distinguished or brilliant, as from any suspicion of levity or of erratic eccentricity. In a word, I regarded her as just a very ordinary woman."

And so little Figgey, as she ran about in the grounds of her ancestral castle, was a very plain, uninteresting child, an ugly duckling, in fact.

Amidst the modest surroundings of the diminutive court in which she grew up, Russia was already a word to conjure with. Figgey's imagination was early fired by tales of the prowess of the Emperor of Russia, who had not so long ago besieged Stettin, of that Peter the Great who had led his troops to victory against the Danes, himself wading breast-high in water. Russia was a sort of land of promise to which her neighbours journeyed to make their fortunes, where all the nobles were fabulously rich, and where there was always an opening for the poor but industrious children of the inhospitable Fatherland. Her mother and all her maternal relations looked upon the Court of Russia as poor relations look upon the prosperous and influential head of the family. The mother of the graceless Duke of Holstein, her precocious and dissipated little third cousin, had been the heiress to the Russian throne, the pathetic and romantic story of his uncle's courtship, betrothal, and premature death was a frequent subject of conversation. When therefore a messenger arrived to announce the accession to the throne of this very Elizabeth around whom so much romance had centred, the hopes

and cupidity of all the members of the Holstein-Gottorp family were suddenly revived. For Elizabeth had always taken a keen interest in this family, had obtained the portraits of its various members, and had shown in a variety of ways how tender was her solicitude for the relatives of her late sister's husband and of her beloved fiancé, the handsome Prince Charles. The beautiful Princess had never married, and now she was an Empress ! During the reign of the Empress Anne of Russia the Kiel infant was regarded as a sort of horrid nightmare, a disturbing factor, and a possible pretender to the throne who destroyed the peace of mind and interfered with the plans of those in power. For this little Duke of Holstein was the grandson of Peter the Great and had been christened after his grandfather. From time to time the Empress Anne used to exclaim with indignation : " That little devil of Holstein is still alive ! "

On the receipt of the surprising intelligence that the beautiful Elizabeth had become Empress, the wise and worldly mother of little Figgey hastened to send her congratulations and, certainly, most sincere good wishes. In reply, Princess Johanna Elizabeth received a very affectionate and tender letter praying for the dispatch to the Empress of a portrait of her late sister Anne which had previously been in St. Petersburg but had now become the property of the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst, and of course the latter complied with the pious request. This was in the January of 1742 ; in the following July, Frederick II, to please the Empress of Russia, promoted Prince Christian Augustus to the rank of Field-Marshal, whilst the young Duke of Holstein had in the meantime been invited to Russia ; in September Princess Johanna Elizabeth received a miniature portrait of the Empress set in brilliants and valued at 18,000 roubles ; and in November the Kiel infant, " the little devil of Holstein," was proclaimed heir-apparent to the Russian throne.

Events were moving rapidly. In the family circle at Stettin the praises of the Empress were being constantly sung, and the splendour of Russia dinned into the ears of the little Princess on whose forehead fortune-tellers had already discerned three crowns. That very winter she had to go to Berlin to have her portrait painted for her uncle, Prince Augustus, to take to St. Petersburg. The whole of the year 1743 was spent either in Berlin or at

Stettin, and at the latter place fresh evidence of the goodwill of the Empress Elizabeth was manifested by the announcement that another uncle, Prince Adolphus Frederick, had, thanks to her, been proclaimed heir-apparent to the crown of Sweden.

On the 1st January 1744, whilst the family were celebrating the New Year in the private chapel of the castle of Zerbst, a letter from Brümmer was received from St. Petersburg addressed to the Princess Johanna Elizabeth. This letter, dated 17th December 1743, was a lengthy document couched in the wearisome and long-winded language of the eighteenth century. The letter was even more remarkable for what it did not say than for what it said. In it Brümmer, who was the Court-Marshal, such was his official title, to the Grand-Duke Peter, assures the Princess of his devotion to her and to her house, and tells her how he has been working for the welfare of her family with a view to the restoration and firm establishment of its prosperity. Having done all he could in this difficult matter, it was now for her to put her hand to the task and complete it. She is therefore invited to come to St. Petersburg with her eldest daughter and pay her homages to the "divine" Empress. For weighty reasons the Empress does not desire her to be accompanied by her husband. In order to facilitate the journey and to enable suitable preparations to be made without delay, a substantial draft is enclosed. Brümmer adds: "Your Highness is too enlightened not to understand the true meaning of the impatience with which Her Imperial Majesty desires to see here as soon as possible yourself as well as the Princess, your daughter, of whom rumour has told us so much good. There are cases where the voice of the people is indeed the voice of God." In order that all the circumstances of this matter might be known to the Princess, Brümmer wrote, he had the honour to inform her that the King of Prussia had been admitted to the secret and could be consulted or not as might seem best. The letter prescribes an itinerary, and in a postscript the Princess is requested to travel incognita as the Countess Reinbeck until she arrives at Riga, where an escort will await her.

A few hours later there arrived a less ambiguous and more outspoken epistle from the King of Prussia himself, commencing

quaintly : " Madam, my Cousin ! " In this the King informs the Princess that his great esteem for her makes it his duty to tell her of the object of her journey. " My confidence," he says, " in your excellent qualities permit me to hope that you will treat with discretion my communication regarding a matter the success of which depends on the maintenance of absolute secrecy. In this conviction I do not desire to conceal from you any longer that in consequence of the regard cherished by me for you and for the Princess your daughter, I always desired her to be more than ordinarily happy, and I have had the idea that it might be possible to promote a union of her with her third cousin, the Grand-Duke of Russia." (It is to be hoped that Frederick was unconscious of the irony of this sentence.) He goes on to say how he had given instructions to follow up this idea secretly, in the hope that it would not be disagreeable to her. After touching lightly on certain difficulties arising out of consanguinity and similar considerations, which had been brushed aside, he adds that he had reason to believe in a successful issue provided she gave her consent.

Thus the obscure Princess Johanna Elizabeth found herself the centre of the diplomatic intrigues of exalted personages, courtiers and kings vying with each other to assure her of their goodwill and friendship, and claiming for themselves the credit of being the founders of her good fortune. It is permissible to assume that the astute Princess, who had been courting the favour of the Empress Elizabeth for the last two years, was less surprised than her correspondents may have imagined, and had had shrewd ideas concerning her daughter's destiny for some considerable time past. As we shall presently see, she was a very self-reliant, cool-headed, intriguing person, who had few illusions and less scruples, and looked out upon the world with a fine conquering, or shall we say martial ? spirit. If she had only had a little more heart and a little more breadth of mind, a little less selfishness and less pettiness, she might have been able to watch over her daughter and save and protect her from many of the dangers and troubles which were in store for that high-spirited Princess.

Although the decision to invite the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst to St. Petersburg with her daughter had been arrived at inde-

pendently by the Empress Elizabeth without consulting either her neighbours or her ministers, as has now been conclusively established by Bilbassoff, the question of the marriage of the heir-apparent to the Russian throne had been a source of anxiety to half the courts of Europe and the subject of the intrigues of contemporary diplomacy. The dispatches of the various envoys to the Court of Russia are full of references to this important matter, a French Princess, a Saxon Princess, and even a sister of Frederick II, had all been named, although Frederick had consistently refused "to hand over one of his sisters to Russia," but instructed his representative to suggest several minor princesses, including the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst, and a Hessian Princess. On the 10th December 1743, the Marquis de la Chetardie reported to Paris: "Yesterday evening Lestocq came to see me and informed me that the question of the choice of a bride had been settled, and that the Empress had sent ten thousand roubles (rather more than 40,000 livres) to the Princess of Zerbst, and had invited her to come to St. Petersburg as speedily as possible"; thus putting a stop to further plotting.

When the Empress asked Brümmer how soon the guests from Zerbst might be expected to arrive, that astute courtier truthfully replied: "If Her Highness had but wings she would fly to your Majesty!"

Indeed, by the 10th January 1744 the trousseau of the young Princess and, far more important, her mother's outfit, had been got ready, and the small party started on their momentous journey accompanied by a very limited suite consisting of Captain Lattorf, the keeper of the castle, Hoffräulein von Khayn, lady-in-waiting, and Mlle Schenck, maid. Before their departure the good Prince Christian Augustus handed his daughter a work on religion and his spouse a MS. composed by himself, entitled *Pro Memoria*, in which this simple-minded soldier laid down a few honest religious and worldly precepts for the guidance of his daughter in her new and difficult circumstances. He piously hopes that it may be possible for her to retain the Lutheran faith, to recognize the futility of works, and to look for salvation in a saving faith in the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. His worldly counsels savour of the advice given by Polonius to his son. After exhorting her to obey the Empress, before all things,

and next to God, and her husband next to the Empress, he recommends her to be on familiar terms with nobody but to maintain her own dignity as much as possible ; to be gracious to the servants and favourites of the Court, but exact no favours from them ; scrupulously to observe the ceremonial and etiquette of her new country ; to avoid playing for high stakes. He enjoins thrift in regard to pocket-money, urges the importance of never being without funds. He condemns interference in affairs which do not concern her, and the making of intimate friends.

His little daughter was not yet fifteen when she read these wise and prudent maxims and wrote to her father to assure him that they were engraved on her heart.

Thus fully equipped for mind and body the future " Semiramis " arrived in Berlin, and once more, and for the last time as it happened, beheld the Great Frederick. Her mother behaved with that lack of discretion and that tendency to fussiness which were the provincial characteristics of this rather vulgar Princess. She had interviews with statesmen and generally comported herself in a manner but little in harmony with the supposed secrecy of her journey. Her secret was no doubt more or less public property, nevertheless the grave and wily Podewills succeeded in calming the misgivings of the Saxon resident, and assured him that the only Russian marriage project he had heard of was associated with the name of Princess Maria Anne of Saxony.

Perhaps it was an unlucky day for the young Princess when she left Berlin on her way north, for it was on Friday the 16th January that the real start was made. At Schwedt she parted from her honest soldier father, never to see him again, and was first initiated in the true and mysterious object of her journey. The mother and daughter now assumed the name of Reinbeck, and experienced all the hardships of a journey in a sloshy winter, over bad roads and exposed to the biting bleak winds which blew over from the not very distant sea. The accommodation at the post-houses was far from luxurious, for the road was one but little frequented at that time by others than dispatch-bearers and bagmen. To protect their faces the ladies wore hoods made of wool, which covered them entirely and were provided with peep-holes only for their eyes. " As the strangers' rooms in the

post-houses were not heated, we had to take shelter in the landlords' premises, which resembled more or less respectable pig-styes," the Countess von Reinbeck wrote to her husband. "The landlord, his wife, the house-dog, poultry, and children everywhere, in cradles, on beds, behind stoves, in the straw, all wallowed about in disorder, one alongside of the other like so many cabbages or turnips. But there was nothing for it, so I ordered a bench to be brought and established myself in the centre of the room." And thus travelling in great discomfort and by slow stages they reached Koenigsberg on the 27th January. From here the Dowager Duchess of Holstein, the mother of the Princess, received the first intelligence of the momentous journey. In this letter the Princess informs her mother that although she is not tired she intends to rest a day. Characteristically, no mention is made of the condition of the insignificant little Figgey, the cause of the expedition. From Koenigsberg to Memel the road was excellent, for snow had fallen heavily and sledges could be used, but at Memel there was again no snow nor were there post-horses to be had. Horses had to be hired from the peasants. The party consisted of four carriages and twenty-four horses were required. As the sledges previously used had to be attached to the backs of the carriages, the caravan made a very ludicrous appearance as it slowly proceeded to Mittau. On the way poor little Figgey upset her digestion, but in her letter to her father she tells him that there had been no complications; she had, she said, drunk up all the beer she could get on the road, "but my dear mama has taken the beer away from me, and now I am quite well."

By the time they reached Mittau, on the 5th of February, they were thoroughly tired out. Here the party were for the first time received in a manner becoming their dignity. Colonel Voyerikoff, commanding the Russian garrison, presented himself, and expressed his satisfaction at having the distinction to be the first Russian to have the honour of receiving such near relations of his gracious sovereign. The party left Mittau on the 6th and arrived at Riga on the same day. Outside this city they were met by Narishkin, late ambassador to London, and Court Marshal, who welcomed them on behalf of his august mistress, and handed the Princess a characteristic effusion from Brümmer, enclosing a credit of Rs.2000. At Riga itself a state reception

awaited them ; salutes were fired, the civil and military authorities turned out ; a guard of honour was given them as an escort, and they were generally made to feel their importance. Military bands, court etiquette, silver plate, silk, satin, and velvet, and general imperial gorgeousness superseded the hardships of Prussian travel. The Princess did not fail to send her husband a detailed description of all these splendours. Here little Figgey, the negligible cause of all this distinction, was handed the first of the many presents she was to receive from the Empress Elizabeth. This was nothing less than one of those wonderful sable furs for which Russia is still famous. Riga was left on the 9th of February at 11 a.m., and the departure partook of the nature of a triumphal procession, the whole town turning out to give the cortège a send-off. They drove in imperial sledges—provided for the journey with sable rugs, and satin cushions and bedding—drawn by a team of ten horses, two abreast. They were given an escort of mounted cuirassiers and were accompanied by a numerous and distinguished suite. They travelled so expeditiously, although they were always put up for the night and stopped at regular intervals for their various meals, that they reached St. Petersburg on the 3rd/14th February at noon, where they were taken to the Winter Palace. It was a bright frosty day. The Court had gone to Moscow, and St. Petersburg was empty. Lord Hyndford, the British Ambassador, reporting one of these transigrations of the Court from the new to the old capital, says : “ There are near a hundred thousand people in motion for that journey.” The parsimonious Frederick II of Prussia granted his envoy 1200 *écus* travelling expenses for this change of residence, which frequently took months to effect.

On the arrival of the Zerbst Princesses the spacious reception-rooms of the Winter Palace were crammed with “ thousands of people ” who had to be presented. This was very fatiguing, but the indomitable Princess nevertheless wrote the Empress a long letter on the selfsame day in which, however, her magnificent and incorrigible egotism was involuntarily exhibited, for it did not contain a single reference to her daughter, for whom the journey had been undertaken. She did not omit to indite a long and fulsome letter to Count Voronzoff. In a letter to her *chers parens* she describes her first day in St. Petersburg : “ I

dined alone with the ladies and gentlemen whom the Empress has appointed to attend me. In the evening various ladies called on me. I played cards and had supper with such as were deemed worthy." On the following day she received "the priests and monks," and adds: "To the honour of the Russians I must say that they are clever people. I see old generals who have served and assisted Peter the Great. I experience no fatigue in listening to their stories about their creator, as they call him." Her husband she informed: "Figgey bears the fatigue better than I do, but, thank God, we are both well." To Frederick II she wrote: "An iron constitution is needed to stand the hardships of this journey and the fatigue of court etiquette. My daughter is more fortunate than I in this respect; she is supported by her youth. Like young soldiers who despise danger because they are too inexperienced to understand it, she is enjoying the grandeur with which she is surrounded." Indeed, one of the first sights which Princess Sophia was shown, on the very day of her arrival, was the famous Preobrajensky Barracks, "the place from which the Empress proceeded when she took possession of the throne." She saw the men who escorted Elizabeth and heard them relate the details of the famous events of the 25th November 1741.

Wyck, the British Envoy, wrote that the Princesses had received many distinguished visitors, and that the French and Prussian Envoys, "Mr. de la Chetardie and Mr. Mardefeldt, have been very assiduous in making their court"; and in an earlier dispatch he writes: "I have the honour to be acquainted with the Mother since her infancy."

De la Chetardie was of course anxious to disabuse the mind of the Princess of any idea of the rivalry of a French candidate for the hand of the heir-apparent, and pretended this candidature was but a diplomatic ruse to counteract the hostility of Great Britain and Saxony to a marriage which might lead to an alliance between Prussia, Sweden, and Russia.

Mardefeldt, on the other hand, desired to represent the difficulties in the way, especially in view of consanguinity, and how he had succeeded by dint of his astute efforts, and by heavily bribing the Holy Synod, in overcoming them. There is little ground for believing these stories, though it is on record that

Mardefeldt obtained considerable sums from Frederick II for this purpose, but Russian writers have demonstrated the improbability of these sums having been applied as pretended.

In the next chapter we propose to give a general review of the state of the Russian Court at the time of the arrival of the future ruler of that country, all unconscious of her fate, and of the various political influences at work there. For the present therefore we must take leave of the two Princesses of Zerbst, mother and daughter, who were now summoned by the Empress to come to Moscow, and duly proceeded thither in suitable style and with all the circumstances of luxury and magnificence which Russia and the eighteenth century were capable of affording. All this was indeed a change from the days of frugal simplicity in Stettin. The person, however, whose head was turned was not the sedate and wondering little Figgey, but her astute, manœuvring, and lamentably vulgar mother, who could not be made to understand that, for the purposes of this visit at least, her unattractive daughter of barely fifteen, pale, thin, and childish, was of even greater importance than the wife of the reigning princeling of Anhalt-Zerbst, though he was a field-marshal in the Prussian army, and although that wife was a Holstein-Gottorp—a family which, but for its accidental alliance with the house of Russia, was no more distinguished than his own.

CHAPTER II

THE COURT OF ST. PETERSBURG

ELIZABETH ascended the throne of Russia in 1741; Peter I, the Great, died prematurely in 1725. In that interval of sixteen years much water had flowed down the Neva, from Lake Ladoga into the Gulf of Finland. Of Peter the Great, the creator of St. Petersburg, his admiral, Villebois, has written : " Il était un vray monstre de luxure, et, quoique laborieux, il s'abandonnait parfois, si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, à des accès de fureur amoureuse dans lesquels l'âge et le sexe même luy importaient médiocrement."

Peter appointed his second wife and boon companion, Catherine, to be his successor. This woman of obscure origin (she is said to have been brought up as a servant in Livonia), after becoming the joint paramour of Peter and his favourite Menshikoff without deceiving the one or the other, went through a ceremony of marriage (after divorcing her first husband) with Peter and was crowned by him, his wife Evdokia having been previously put away. In the eyes of the Russian Orthodox Church this second marriage was not valid, especially as Catherine's first husband was alive, nor were the children of Catherine considered legitimate. Consequently while Peter was yet lying in his death agony, the principal nobles of Russia held a secret meeting at which it was resolved to arrest Catherine on his death and to proclaim his grandson, Peter Alexeyevitch, the son of that unfortunate Alexis who was tortured and finally beheaded by his semi-insane father. For Peter the Great's ideas of duty were as heroic as all his other ideas, and offer yet another illustration of the close alliance of madness to genius.

Catherine was apprised of the decision of the nobles by Bassevitch, who informed her of it in the night. She was prostrated

with grief and incapable of forming any decision, but begged Bassevitch to consult with Menshikoff and promised to do whatever they advised. How Menshikoff was awakened in his sleep, immediately seized the treasure, secured the fortress, and bribed the guards, some of the nobles, and the principal clergy are matters of history. Catherine I was a simple creature who had fortune forced upon her. Gordon describes her as "a very pretty, well lookt woman, of good sense, but not of that sublimity of wit, or rather of that quickness of imagination, which some people have believed. The great reason why the Czar was so fond of her, was her exceeding good temper; she never was seen peevish or out of humour; obliging and civil to all, and never forgetful of her former condition; withal mighty grateful." She could neither read nor write, and her reign, which lasted but two years, has been described as the reign of Menshikoff. It is not surprising that this amiable and uneducated woman should have lacked the moral sense. During the two years of her reign she maintained two lovers, and frequently drank more Tokay than was consistent with sobriety.

Catherine I had two daughters by Peter: Anne, who was married to Charles Frederick, Duke of Holstein-Gottorp; and Elizabeth, unmarried. On the death of the Empress, the crown devolved upon Peter the Great's grandson, Peter, the son of the rebellious Alexis. This boy was between twelve and thirteen years of age when he came to the throne, and the Empress had provided that he should be placed under the guardianship of her daughters Anne and Elizabeth, and of the Duke of Holstein and the Bishop of Lübeck, as well as the Supreme Council. But Menshikoff drove the Duke of Holstein out of Russia and virtually took the reins of government into his own hands. He betrothed the Emperor to his own daughter and proceeded to assume parental authority over him and to treat him with austere and imperious severity. Peter was a boy of spirit, and in 1727 got the Dolgorouki family, with whom he was distantly connected, to turn Menshikoff out. This extraordinary man, who began life by selling hot pies in the bazaars, now experienced a reverse of fortune; he was exiled to Siberia, and his great and ill-gotten wealth confiscated. Although he bore his disgrace manfully he did not long survive it, and died in 1729. Peter II,

having got rid of Menshikoff, turned his back on St. Petersburg and the foreign institutions introduced by his grandfather, and, taking up his residence in Moscow, reverted to Russian customs. He was now betrothed to a Princess Dolgorouki, and it seemed as though Russia was definitely closing the window looking out into Europe which Peter the Great had so laboriously constructed, when suddenly his grandson contracted small-pox and died in 1730 ; and thus the house of Romanoff in the male line became extinct.

On his death the Dolgoroukis produced what purported to be the will of Peter II, according to which the Princess to whom he had been betrothed was to succeed him. The other nobles on the Council of State, however, declared the document a forgery, and conceived the bold idea of converting the autocracy into a sort of oligarchic limited monarchy, of which they proposed to pull the strings. As the will of Peter II was pronounced to be a forgery and that of Catherine—appointing, in the event of failure of issue to Peter II, the Duchess Anne of Holstein and her children as heirs, with remainder to Elizabeth—was disregarded, because Catherine herself was considered a usurper and her children illegitimate, the Council proceeded to elect a successor of their own choice.

Now Peter the Great had had a step-brother, Ivan, who had shared the throne with him, and jointly with Peter had held the title of Tzar. Three daughters of this Tzar Ivan were still living : the eldest had married a Duke of Mecklenburg, but had sought refuge from his turbulence in St. Petersburg, where she lived in retirement ; the second, Anne, had married the Duke of Courland, and was living as his widow in Mittau ; the third was still unmarried, and lived in St. Petersburg. The choice of the Council fell on Anne of Courland, and a sort of draft constitution was drawn up, the most important provisions in which were that taxation could not be imposed without the consent of the Senate, and that war and peace depended on the advice of that body. Anne subscribed to these conditions, and had the new form of government publicly proclaimed, but, against the express stipulations of the Council, she nevertheless brought with her to Moscow an obscure and rather shabby individual called Biren, who was her lover, and was later to become the scourge of Russia.

Had the Council had the power and the courage to expel this favourite, the history of Russia would probably have been very different from what it has been, but they failed at the critical moment, and Anne summoned a sort of national assembly, the probity and independence of the deputies to which were not above suspicion. This Assembly, to the feigned surprise of the Empress, rejected the new-fangled form of government, and so Anne tore up, in the presence of the deputies, the constitution she had been compelled to sign as a condition of her accession. Although nominally governed by Anne, Russia was now really ruled by her favourite and Grand Chamberlain, von Biren, a man of no capacity but of great brutality. He was aided by the wise and honest Ostermann, the Nestor of Russian diplomacy, and the accomplished Marshal Count Münnich, who gave Russia roads and, with the aid of Peter Lacy, that famous Irish soldier of fortune, organized and commanded her forces.

The Empress Anne was a masculine Princess who punished the nobles who had attempted to limit and circumscribe her power with a rigour which seemed to aim at their extinction. The nobles of Russia were then taught a lesson, and remained in a state of abject subjection for nearly a century afterwards, and when, in 1825, they once again endeavoured to assert themselves, their ghastly failure demonstrated the hopelessness of their case.

During her long residence in Courland, Anne had acquired tastes rather more refined than might have been expected from her antecedents. It was her ambition to make her Court the most brilliant in Europe; in this she failed, but she succeeded in gathering about her an incongruous display of profusion without elegance, tawdry finery, pomp and squalor. Gross gluttony and drunkenness disappeared in some measure from her Court; but dissipation of every kind, ruinous extravagance, and reckless gambling were the fashion. Yet under the wise administration of Ostermann and Münnich the political and military affairs of the State did not suffer. The interests of industry and civilization were by them promoted, but morality remained as it had ever been, except that its sepulchres were painted and gilt. The greatest splendour and immeasurable extravagance were but a veneer covering, though scarcely con-

cealing, the rudest barbarism, and at the same time there was often a want of the barest and simplest of necessities.

In appearance, Anne was fat with a yellow complexion and a greasy face which, as she was very dark, emphasized her ugliness. Her forehead was narrow, her eyes small, wild, and fierce, she had a long prominent nose, thin lips, a disagreeable mouth, and was short in stature. The Marquis de la Chetardie used to say that she looked well from behind. Her neck and shoulders, arms and hands were in keeping with the rest. She was of a lugubrious and melancholy disposition and addicted to drink. Suspicious of everybody, she exhibited tenderness and affection for no one, although she was reputed to have a temperament, in which, however, it is said, vanity played the principal part. She was harsh and cruel, and behaved with so little decency in church that she scandalized her pious subjects.

The state of society at that time may be best appreciated from the fact that, while Peter I never had fewer than twelve buffoons, Anne had as many as six, three of whom were men of highest birth, and no private household with any pretensions was without at least one. These buffoons were birched if they failed in their duty or did not submit with a good grace to perform such fooleries as were required of them. One of Anne's buffoons was the famous Prince Golitzin, a man of forty and a widower, whom she married to one of her waiting-women, a Calmuck hunchback, named Boujini novna. For the purposes of the wedding an ice-palace was erected on the Neva, furnished throughout in the same material, and illuminated by means of candles of ice soaked in naphtha. Fountains of petroleum played into basins constructed of ice, and, as the bridal procession approached the palace, salutes were fired from ice-cannon placed at the entrance, and ice-elephants spurted naphtha from their frozen trunks. It was an exceptionally cold winter even for St. Petersburg. The bridal procession was a sort of pageant, the governors of all the provinces of the empire were instructed to send each a couple attired in the local national dress. Three hundred persons composed this extraordinary procession, some on horseback, some on donkeys, others on camels, reindeer, oxen, goats, dogs, and even pigs. The "happy pair" were placed in a cage which was carried on the back of an elephant. All this motley crowd

used before the imperial palace and through the principal streets of the capital. The banquet was served in Biren's famous riding-school, the scene of so many tragedies, and here the special dishes of the various countries or districts represented were served. A ball followed, at which the different national airs and dances of the empire were introduced. After these festivities the unfortunate bride and bridegroom were re-conducted to the illuminated ice-palace, where they were placed upon an arched bed, and left for the night. A cordon of sentries kept guard all night to prevent them from escaping, and on the following morning the genial Empress was graciously pleased to visit her stepson and his hunchback wife and exchange with them some light-hearted and elegant badinage. It was in this reign that a Russian nobleman had the temerity to become a convert to Judaism, for which act of apostasy he and the Jew who converted him were burnt alive.

Of course those were rude times ; in the neighbouring State of Russia, Frederick William I, though more frugal, was quite as coarse and cruel in his humour, and even in France and England manners were far from mild. Nevertheless, from the point of view of grossness and cruelty, self-indulgence and barbaric curiousness, Russia was pre-eminent.

Anne had no children or at least, if the scandalous story be true at Biren's son Peter was hers, no legitimate children of her own. Her favourite sister Catherine, who had been married to a Duke of Mecklenburg, died without leaving a male child, but her daughter Anne was adopted by the Empress. Lady Rondeau, the wife of the British Minister, only knew her as a shy and awkward girl and thought her stupid. She is described as a round-faced, pleasant-looking blonde, very good-natured and easy-going, if rather indolent and deficient in energy. The Empress selected her to be the mother of the future Emperor of Russia, and, whilst she was yet in her teens, patched her Grand Chamberlain to the Court of Vienna to find her a suitable mate. The choice fell on Prince Anthony Ulrick of Brunswick-Bevern, who was forthwith dispatched to Russia to be educated. The young couple grew up under the eyes of the Empress but betrayed no inclination for each other. Indeed, the young Princess took so little pains to disguise her dislike for her husband *in futuro* that Biren, Duke of Courland, thought there

might be a chance for his own son Peter, the reputed offspring of his relations with the Empress when she was herself but Duchess of Courland and he, the grandson of a groom, her obscure servitor and lover. Peter was five years younger than the Princess, who repelled with scorn Biren's overtures, made through the intermediary of Princess Stcherbatoff, the female buffoon of the Empress. In July 1739 the marriage of "inconvenience" between Prince Anthony Ulrick and Princess Anne was celebrated, and in August 1740 the Empress had the satisfaction of holding in her arms at the font the future Emperor Ivan III of tragic memory. Six weeks later, Sunday, 16th October, the Empress was seized with a fit whilst at table, and removed insensible to her bed which she was never to leave alive. At first Anne rallied, and it was hoped that the skill of her Portuguese physician, Sanchez, might prolong her life for some months, though, from the nature of her malady, a permanent cure was well-nigh impossible. On the 22nd October she was so much better that a complete recovery was talked of, but on the 26th the Empress had a relapse, and in the evening of the 28th she expired.¹ During the anxious period of her indisposition Biren was horribly agitated, and at a loss to know what course to adopt. After consultation with her ministers, he asked Anne to appoint him Regent during the infancy of Ivan. Anne readily signed a decree appointing Ivan her successor, but hesitated to accede to Biren's request, for her clear common-sense told her that her favourite's well-merited unpopularity would cause his fall as soon as she was no longer alive to support and shield him. But, blinded by ambition, the infatuated Duke succeeded in persuading her to sign a "positive declaration" appointing him Regent.

Although Russia had prospered under the reign of Anne, who governed by means of a Cabinet consisting of three persons, of whom Ostermann was the most important, she was not popular, for she was too partial to foreigners; moreover, the severities and cruelties of Biren were laid at her door. Ernest Johan Biren (Biron or Bühren) was the grandson of a groom in the service of Duke James III of Courland, who bestowed upon him a small estate where Ernest Johan was born on 1st December 1690.

¹ The cause of death was supposed to be stone in the kidney with complications.

After an idle and vagabond youth he gained a footing at the court of Mittau through the dishonour of his sister. Here he attracted the attention of the Duchess by his handsome face and figure and bluff bonhomie, and succeeded in supplanting her older lover, Peter Bestujev. When the Russian deputies arrived at Mittau to announce the election of Anne to the throne, a former successful lover, Prince Vassili Dolgorouki, who was doubtless in hopes of renewing his relations, on entering her apartment found with her a man rather meanly dressed, to whom he made a sign to retire. As the man did not stir, the tactless Dolgorouki took him by the arm to emphasize the hint, but Anne stopped him, for the shabby person was Biren, who never forgave Dolgorouki. During the later years of Anne's life Biren increased so enormously in power and riches that he must have been a marvel to himself as well as to others. His apartments in the palace adjoined those of Anne, and his liveries, furniture, and equipages were scarcely less magnificent than hers. Half the bribes intended for the Russian Court passed through his hands. The massive gorgeousness of his silver plate astonished the French Ambassador, and the diamonds of his wife (a Fräulein von Treiden, by whom he had several children) were the envy of princes. In 1737 he was elected Duke of Courland and became a Most Serene Highness. Although Biren did not meddle with affairs of State, which he left to the Cabinet, he was a man of fierce and cruel hatreds and of a vindictive disposition. People who had the misfortune to offend him were kidnapped into his riding-school and stables and inhumanly flogged, and it is estimated that during the ten years of Biren's supremacy more than 20,000 people (some say 40,000) were sent to Siberia, of whom 5000 were never again heard of. The Empress would often fall on her knees before him in hopes of moving his clemency, but neither her prayers nor her tears were able to affect this obdurate monster, whose cruelties, practised on the most illustrious persons of the country, almost exceed belief. The Minister, Valinsky, he beheaded.

Under Anne the prestige of Russia was immensely increased in Europe, thanks to her victory over the Turks and the able diplomacy of Ostermann, and both France and England grew equally apprehensive of the sudden rise of this new power which, according to Rondeau, was beginning "to have a great deal to say

in the affairs of Europe," and England was even anxiously desirous of concluding an alliance with her.

When, after the death of Anne, her will appointing her great-nephew Ivan, Emperor, and Biren Regent, was read out in the great hall of the Summer Palace on the 29th October 1740, the indignation of the child's parents may be imagined. Prince Anthony gave voice to his feelings in conversation with the officers of the regiment he commanded, and even hinted that the will was a forgery. Biren hearing this, had him arraigned before a general assembly of the Cabinet, the Senate, and the nobility, and publicly rebuked him. The Prince broke down with a lamentable want of courage, burst into tears, and made a confession of conspiracy implicating a number of unfortunate officers in his regiment, who were knouted and degraded to the ranks, whilst Prince Anthony was deprived of all his offices and virtually made a prisoner in his wife's apartments, whence he did not venture to emerge till after the fall of Biren. This latter event was brought about by Marshal Count Münnich, the distinguished soldier who had with Peter Lacy been mainly instrumental in the aggrandizement of Russia, and whom Biren was unwise enough to slight. The Grand-Duchess Anne, the Emperor's mother, though lazy and good-natured, was not lacking in spirit, and had several altercations with Biren, who actually threatened to have her and her husband expelled the country. This was too much ; the outraged mother confided in the discontented Münnich, who was an abler and bolder conspirator than her weak-kneed husband. One eventful night, at the head of his Preobrajensky Grenadier Guards, Münnich quietly arrested Biren in bed, where he was peacefully sleeping by the side of his wife, and after a desperate struggle, in which he kicked and bit like a maniac, Biren was bound fast by the soldiers, and, with a quilt thrown over him, flung into Münnich's coach, his wife being served in the same manner. All Biren's partisans were also arrested, and the same morning his regency was annulled and that of the Grand-Duchess Anne proclaimed in its stead. The whole Biren family were incarcerated in the fortress of Schlüsselburg, and all the acts of the Biren regency, of a brief three weeks' duration, were annulled and expunged from the public records. Biren's punishment was perhaps less severe than he deserved. He was examined, though not tortured,

and condemned to death by quartering, an inhuman sentence which the kindly Anne commuted to banishment to Siberia. His property was confiscated, and he became an exile, yet he lived to return to Courland, and to rule his duchy with some success.

Münich was now in the ascendant, and got himself appointed Prime Minister, a unique office, which he was the first and last to hold. . Bribe by Frederick the Great he forsook the policy of adherence to Austria consistently followed by Ostermann, whom Münich placed on the shelf as Grand-Admiral. His boundless rapacity (he amassed more wealth in two months than Biren had accumulated in his first seven years) and his overbearing insolence became too much for the amiable Anne, who, gladly listening to Ostermann's representations that the Prime Minister's ignorance of affairs was damaging the country, restricted his administration to the Army and the Ladoga Canal, while Ostermann was reinstated in the direction of foreign affairs. Naturally Münich sent in his resignation, and, to his dismay, this was graciously accepted. Ostermann now became the virtual ruler of Russia, whilst Anne gave herself up to enjoyment.

Some years before her marriage Anne was suspected of entertaining a tenderness for Count Lynar, the Envoy of Saxony. Rondeau called him "an uncommonly pretty fellow." Before she had had time to compromise herself her stern and sagacious aunt, the Empress Anne, induced Lynar to leave the country for the benefit of his health, and shortly afterwards married her daughter, as we have seen, to Prince Anthony. Adversity kept the uncongenial partners together for a time, but when Anne became Regent they drifted apart; she made a friend and companion of a countrywoman named Fräulein Julia Mengden, who was of about her own age, and was given apartments adjacent to her own, in which the Regent, very much in *deshabille*, with her head tied up in a striped cotton kerchief, would spend most of her time talking and playing cards and surrounded by her favourite's relations.

Finch, the British Envoy, writes to Lord Harrington: "I should give your lordship but a faint idea of the great affection that the Grand-Duchess has for Mlle Mengden, by adding that the passion of a lover for a new mistress is a jest to it. By good

luck she (Miss Mengden) has no great share of parts, nor, as they say, of malice, so that it is to be hoped that she will neither have the power nor the inclination to do much harm." The brother, mother, and a few sisters of this pleasant companion were also invited to Russia and loaded with gifts. One sister, Bina, was attached to the person of the infant Emperor, another had married Münnich's son, and all were rapidly making immense fortunes. Fräulein Mengden was not ungrateful, however, and when Count Lynar returned to St. Petersburg as Saxon Envoy in 1741, and it became evident to her that the Regent's affection for him was stronger than ever, this complaisant bosom-friend, in order to shield her mistress, allowed herself to be married to Lynar so that the intrigue between him and the Grand-Duchess could be secretly carried on in Miss Mengden's apartments. This event occurred but nine days after the birth of Anne's second child Catherine. Fräulein Mengden is even said to have mounted guard outside the door of the Regent's bed-chamber and denied Prince Anthony access to his own wife.

The miserable Prince poured his grievances into the ears of Ostermann, whom he called his mentor. Generally speaking, this unedifying *ménage* with its strange mixture of Sapphism and adultery scandalized even so lax and demoralized a society as that of St. Petersburg, more especially as people feared that Lynar might develop into a second Biren. The Regent herself was utterly trivial in character; with the exception of her natural mildness of disposition she had not a single quality which could command the respect or admiration of her subjects; moreover, she was painfully shy and suffered so much at public functions that she avoided them altogether; even her rare out-of-door excursions were only taken by moonlight.

All these Annes are no doubt confusing. Peter the Great had a daughter Anne, who became Duchess of Holstein-Gottorp. The Tzar Ivan, Peter's half-brother, also had a daughter Anne, who became Empress of Russia; and she had a niece, also Anne, who became the mother and regent of the infant Emperor Ivan III. But while these various Annes disported themselves on the public stage, there was living another daughter of Peter the Great and Catherine I, Elizabeth by name, who was regarded as an inconvenient person. It was felt that she might at any



THE EMPRESS ELIZABETH

moment become a dangerous puppet in the hands of designing conspirators, although she was considered to be personally a negligible quantity. This Elizabeth was born on the 18th December 1709 at the old wooden palace of Kolmenskoye, near Moscow, which Peter the Great had bestowed on his mistress whom, three years later, he not only married but raised to the imperial throne. On the day of this daughter's birth Peter made his triumphal entry into Moscow after the victory of Pultavo. It was Peter's intention to celebrate the ruin of the Swedish power by an elaborate religious ceremony ; but, on being informed of the birth of another daughter, he contented himself with a hasty *Te Deum* at the Uspensky Cathedral, and posted off to Kolmenskoye to fête the mother and babe in his usual barbaric fashion. From her earliest years the child delighted every one by her extraordinary beauty and vivacity. Attired in rich variegated Spanish costume, and in gold and silver brocade, Elizabeth figured conspicuously at the rough-and-tumble assemblies which Peter had introduced for the purpose of breaking down the stiff exclusive etiquette of the old court life, and the grace with which the child of nine danced the quadrilles and minuets then in vogue, and the ingenuity with which she devised fresh figures for the cotillions filled everybody with admiration. Count Münnich writes : " At twelve, when I saw her first, she already had a beautiful figure and was full of grace, though inclined even then to be stout and bursting with health and vivacity."

Elizabeth's parts were evidently good if not brilliant ; but unfortunately her education was both imperfect and desultory. Her father had no leisure to devote to her training, her mother was too illiterate to superintend her studies. The earliest instructors of herself and her sister Anne (they were educated together) were a Russian nurse and a Finnish woman. After the death of Peter, Catherine I provided the girls with a French governess, who did not, however, live at the palace but only saw her pupils during lessons. Their governor was the Minister of Police, whom Menshikoff thought fit to banish. At a later date Elizabeth picked up some knowledge of French, Italian, German, and Swedish, in which languages she was able to converse with more fluency than accuracy.

Peter wanted Elizabeth to marry Louis XV, who was of the same age, but the Duc d'Orléans declined to entertain the idea, for the pride of the French Court rebelled against the thought of a union between the grandson of the *grand monarque* and the daughter of a base-born *parvenue*. Elizabeth was then offered to the Duke of Bourbon, who refused her without giving any reason. It would be tedious and difficult to enumerate all the marriage projects of which Elizabeth was the subject. Besides the throng of German princelings who were eager for her hand, there were Don Manoel, Infant of Portugal, and a Persian Prince, the son of Shah Nadir. There were also several Russian noblemen among the candidates. Of all these, as we have seen, Prince Charles of Holstein was the only one who found favour. Just before the marriage was to be celebrated, the Prince fell ill and died. Elizabeth, who loved him to excess, became inconsolable; and in the bitterness of her grief made a vow to renounce the nuptial tie, a vow which she religiously kept, at least as to the public. She retained, in spite of her numerous aberrations and gallantries, a lively tenderness for the object of her first affection, and paid a sort of worship to his memory, never mentioning him without tears.

On the death of her mother in 1727 and the departure from Russia, three months later, of her beloved sister Anne, her only surviving near relation, Princess Elizabeth found herself practically her own mistress at the age of eighteen. It seems that everybody was in love with her: her nephew, Peter II, Menshikoff, Prince Dolgorouki. But these exalted persons did not move her heart. She preferred to bestow her affections on less distinguished but possibly more responsive persons, such as the guardsman Boutourlin, the handsome Sergeant Shoubin,¹ the ostler Vozjinsky, the page Lyalin, and many others. Elizabeth had to put up with much petty tyranny and persecution from the plain ladies who were in power and were no doubt envious of her beauty, as well as from Menshikoff, Dolgorouki, Biren, and Ostermann, all of whom dreaded her popularity and obliged her to live away from the Court in the charming environs of Moscow. Prince Anthony Ulrick wanted her to marry his

¹ On the discovery of this intrigue the Empress Anne exiled Shoubin to Kamstchatka, after causing his tongue to be cut out.

brother, who besides being deformed was a most repulsive person, and others even talked of putting her into a convent, a proposal which struck Finch, the British Envoy, as most ludicrous, seeing that, to use his own elegant expression, she "had not an ounce of nun's flesh about her." She therefore fled to Alexandrovsk, where she gave herself up to the embraces of her lover and went about in male attire, which seems to have been particularly becoming to her. Here she listened to the songs of the peasant girls, and spent her time in boating, riding, sledging, skating, and the chase. It seems that she also "shamelessly did things which brought the blush to the cheek of the least modest." Then again she would have intermittent fits of piety and spend her days in fervent prayer. In political intrigue she took no interest; her intrigues were all of a different character. But the people were clamouring for her, and foreign diplomatists were urging her to place herself at the head of the nation. M. de la Chetardie, the French Envoy, even promised to supply her with the necessary funds. Finally, when her position became too intolerable, and this self-indulgent voluptuary, who was certainly the reverse of dangerous to the reigning family, found herself in danger of losing her liberty, she bestirred herself, came to St. Petersburg to plot in self-defence, and took up her abode at Smolny, close to the guards' barracks. With the latter she hobnobbed, caroused, gambled, and plunged into the wildest debaucheries. Three hundred men of the guards were said to have been her lovers, and though it has been maintained that this was an exaggeration, there is no question but that Schwarz, a bandsman, Grünstein, a sergeant, Vorontzoff, her groom of the chambers, were all distinguished by her favours. To her surgeon, Armand Lestocq, she entrusted the conduct of the conspiracy and operations. The stirring story of the midnight *coup d'état* by means of which Elizabeth possessed herself of the persons of the infant Emperor and his parents need not be retold in these pages, but it may be permitted to point out that unless Elizabeth had had the sympathy of the nation with her she could not possibly have succeeded as she did. She was without doubt the most popular figure of the time in Russia. The Russian people, after ten years of Biren rule, had discovered that the German princes and princesses, with their German

favourites and statesmen, were at least as rapacious if they were not quite so cruel as an Empress Anne and a Duke of Courland. Besides, these appealed to the imagination: Anne was the daughter of a Russian Tsar, and the tyrant Biren was picturesque, lavish, and imposing. But the miserable Grand-Duchess Anne, with her male and female lovers, and her cowardly and abject husband, who never showed themselves, had no claims whatever on the affection of the people. They were not even of Russian blood, and they were impotent even among their own partisans. Russia was ruled by Ostermann, whom the people hated. Prince Anthony, cowardly though he was, was a martinet and hated by the troops. The French Envoy, an elegant and popular figure at Court, was actively working for Elizabeth, who, as the beautiful and persecuted daughter of the heroic regenerator of his country, was adored and worshipped as much on account of the glamour of her glorious parentage as for her own sake.¹ What wonder that she succeeded! The Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst, the mother of Catherine II, has left us a vivid pen-picture of the remarkable woman who raised herself to the throne by the aid of the bayonets of her lovers and boon companions. She describes her as tall and fine, but very well made, though growing stout. "Never was head more perfect. It is true that the nose is less so than other parts of it, but at least it is there and in the right place. Her mouth is unique: there never has been anything like it: it is full of grace, laughter, and play. She cannot make grimaces, she has never produced any but graceful lines on her face. One would adore an oath from her, if her lips could frame one. Two rows of pearls appear behind the vermilion of those lips, which must be seen before an idea can be formed of them. The eyes are soft and tender, that was the effect they produced on me. They appear to be dark but are really blue. They inspire you with all the sweetness which animates them. They impose a respect born of the affections, and steal your heart; you cannot gaze upon them without succumbing to a secret charm which will make you hers for ever. There never was a more pleasant brow. Her hair is so well grown that it falls artistically in response to a touch from the comb. The Empress has black eyebrows, and

¹ It is said that the very shopkeepers refused to accept money when she made purchases of them.

her hair is naturally powdered. Her whole appearance is noble, her walk beautiful, she is gracious in her address, she speaks well, with a pleasant voice, and the right gestures. In short, nobody has ever resembled her. Never have such beautiful hands, such glorious colouring, such a lovely neck been seen before. Believe me, I am something of a connoisseur, and I am quite unbiased. The mind would even have been equal to the exterior had the education which the children of the Emperor, her father, received but been in consonance with the other designs and wide range of the genius of that august prince. We should sigh at the weakness of our heroes ; but give their characters their due in respect of those qualities which distinguish them from ordinary mortals. The Empress Elizabeth has a kind, generous, and magnanimous heart. Sweetness forms the basis of her character. She possesses a decorous cheerfulness which adorns her gaiety. I have never seen her otherwise than in good spirits, such as make her idolized ; she is only serious at certain moments which are of short duration, her sweetness recompenses you for those moments and it never leaves her. Nobody was ever equally humane as she. A good friend, she will share your griefs with you, and will console and soothe you. Her heart is made for tenderness, her mind is cut out for a ruler. Intrepid, resolute, knowing how to undertake and how to carry out ; the moment of her glorious accession to the throne has sufficiently portrayed her. She has much wit, rapid grasp, ability, but rather too little assiduity. This is not surprising, ascending the throne at thirty-seven, as she did, I think she could doubtlessly not have accustomed herself during the irresponsible life she led as Princess Elizabeth, to the government of the colossus she has undertaken. Such as I have painted her, Princess Elizabeth, idolized by the nation, feared by the Ministers, the envy of the Empress and Princess Anne, made her way to the throne, skilfully and lavishly directed, by gaining over by her manners and her ample means ladies whose weight and authority could influence entire families."

This remarkable eulogy was written after the irreparable rupture which led to a lifelong separation.

The Empress Elizabeth combined with great kindness of heart and laxity of conduct an indolence in all matters connected with public affairs and the government of the country, which

was not altogether surprising considering her education and early life. Nevertheless, she possessed a profound knowledge of human nature, an unusually sound and keen judgment, and diplomatic tact, in which qualities she greatly resembled Peter the Great.

Shortly after her accession, in 1742, it is commonly believed that she was privately married to her lover, Alexis Rasoumovsky, who as a chorister had captivated her at an early age by his beauty and his voice. He was rapidly promoted, and eventually created a Count and made a Field-Marshal, whilst his brother Cyril was raised to the dignity of Chief, or Hetman, of the Cossacks. Of peasant origin, these two brothers did not abuse the power fortune placed in their hands. Although addicted to drink, and occasionally quarrelsome in his cups, Alexis was a kindly and good-natured person, who was universally beloved, and the same may be said of his more circumspect and sober brother, nor did either the one or the other meddle with politics. The reign of Elizabeth was benign and genial, for the Empress, if she had sinned much had also loved much, and could honestly utter, as she did, the following words in prayer: "Do but love me, oh! my God! in Thy Heavenly Kingdom, as I love this gentle and guileless people!" She was truly a Russian ruler, and the welfare of her beloved country lay nearest to her heart. Her Court offered a pleasant and striking contrast to that of the morose and saturnine Empress Anne, for the radiant joviality of Elizabeth banished everything melancholy and malign from her presence. There was no Biren to domineer or embitter the joys of a Court which freely abandoned itself to its pleasures and frolicked gaily round the frolicsome Empress.

Italian opera and ballet were introduced by Locatelli, and both the native and foreign drama received great encouragement, and towards the end of the reign there were very few Russian youths in the Court set who were not familiar with the works of the great French writers.

The favourite pastime of the Empress was the *bal masqué*, at which she loved to masquerade as a man, for her stately and imposing figure was admirably set off by male attire. These balls were called "Metamorphoses"; for men masqueraded as women and women were metamorphosed into men.

When the Empress ascended the throne, she determined to show her national sympathies, and we find few German names among her entourage. But gradually she and her Court succumbed to the seductive influences of French literature and French manners. It must, however, have been a strange Court this Court of the Empress Elizabeth. At one time she had, duly recognized and accredited and living at the palace, no less than three lovers, and used to sup with all three at the same time, the orgies that followed being wild and extraordinary. Masson, writing of the Russian Court of the mid-eighteenth century, says :

“ Almost all the ladies of the Court kept men with the title and office of favourites : I say not lovers, as that would imply sentiment ; while theirs was merely gross sensuality, or frequently a wish to follow the fashion. This taste was become as common as eating and drinking or dancing and music. No tender intrigues, and much less any strong affections. Debauchery and ambition had banished love. Marriage was merely an association, in which convenience alone was considered ; it was fortunate if friendship sometimes came unsought, to lighten its chains.” Every statement of Masson’s should be taken with several grains of salt, nevertheless this was scarcely a nice court into which to introduce an unsophisticated and inexperienced child such as the young Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst !

The state of society in Russia during the eighteenth century has been a source of indignation and astonishment to a number of writers, especially to foreign contemporaries of these abnormal men and women. People living at the time were unable to judge correctly the true reason for this extraordinary licentiousness ; they could not get a proper perspective, and attributed to innate depravity, the corrupting example of exalted personages, the institution of serfdom, and a variety of other adventitious circumstances, the causes of social phenomena which really lay in a very different direction, and bore an historical and evolutionary rather than an accidental or permanent character.

Before the accession of Peter the Great the Russians were a rude, simple and God-fearing people. They had suffered from the Tartar yoke, and had at the same time acquired some of the Tartar habits. Although polygamy was not practised, the

Mahomedan custom of secluding the women and keeping them separate was adopted. A kind of harem was introduced under the name of Terem. The austerity of the manners of those days is revealed by a sort of manual of conduct, by which every householder was guided, called the Domostroy; here the laws of family life were laid down, the head of the family was enjoined to keep his wife in subjection, chastise her if necessary, and rule and discipline his household.

Peter the Great threw the Domostroy out of window, opened the doors of the Terem, undermined belief in the Orthodox faith, and, by destroying all the traditions of the past, shattered the principles on which the morality of the nation was based. In other words, the floodgates were opened, and the pent-up waters of passion were let loose. The restraint and repression of centuries were suddenly removed, and the nobles of Russia with their wives and children were not merely encouraged, they were compelled, to ape the manners of the foreigner, and it is generally more easy to adopt the vices than to imitate the virtues of our neighbours. The solid, respectable, and conservative elements in Russian society, who resented this leap in the dark out of the decorous Slavonic Middle Ages into the cultured scepticism and licentious corruption of the eighteenth century, and banded themselves together to resist the impetus, were treated as the average club-bore would, it is so believed, like to treat those who venture to contradict him: they were put to death.

The cataclysmic transformation of Russian society by Peter the Great had the effect of pulling it out by the roots. The most unsettling and disturbing of all his reforms was the emancipation of women, for women had been regarded very much from the Tartar and the Mahomedan point of view. They were the source of evil, the cause and foundation, so to speak, of human original sin, and their sudden liberation from restraint was immeasurably in advance of the moral and mental development to which the Russian nation had attained. The Russian people were being Europeanized against their will, and social conditions, the result of centuries of laborious evolution, were imposed on a backward and unprepared, reluctant nation. The relaxation of all the restraints of the past stimulated insub-

ordination to any laws, divine or human, and let loose the lowest passions, for the people were being reformed from the outside, not from within. The spiritual development of a race permits the sublimation of the animal propensities, indispensable to its continuance, into the noblest and most beautiful of the affections, but this is a slow and gradual process. The instantaneous removal of all the external bonds by which the average sensual man is restrained from self-indulgence, without the previous introduction of a nobler and more spiritual system, must obviously and unavoidably be disastrous.

This is what happened in Russia in the eighteenth century. As we shall see, it was due to the philosophic and wise influence of Catherine II that the door was opened to culture and higher thought, and the Russian nation was first started on the path of regeneration and progress which it is now treading, however slowly and painfully.

CHAPTER III

THE PERIOD OF PROBATION

WE have left the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst and her daughter hurrying to Moscow. They departed from St. Petersburg on the 7th of February with the intention of arriving on the 9th, so as to be in time for the birthday of the Grand-Duke Peter on the 10th. In spite of a breakdown on the way and the smashing up of their sledge they succeeded in carrying out their programme. By the aid of a team of sixteen horses they simply flew over the snow. At one place they were handed a letter from Brümmer, at another they met a Chamberlain of the Empress's, and on Thursday evening the 9th February at eight o'clock they arrived at the wooden Golovinskoye Palace. They were received on their arrival by the various court functionaries and a guard of honour, and as soon as they had alighted and entered the palace porch they were met by Brümmer and the famous Lestocq. Scarcely had they reached the apartments prepared for them when they were waited on by the Grand-Duke Peter, who was accompanied by Prince Louis John William of Hesse-Homburg, a Field-Marshal in the Russian army. The Grand-Duke welcomed them in the "tenderest" manner, presented the Prince, and told them that he had been on the point of setting out to meet them, so impatient was he for their arrival. Shortly afterwards the Empress sent word to say that the sooner the Grand-Duke brought the dear guests to her the better would she be pleased. Immediately the entire party proceeded to the private apartments of the Empress.

The Empress Elizabeth awaited them in the first ante-room adjoining her bed-chamber ; she advanced several steps to meet them, embraced, and kissed them. The Princess, having been primed by Brümmer, kissed the hand of the Empress and made



PRINCESS SOPHIA OF ANHALT-ZERBST

a suitable eighteenth-century speech, in which she said she had no merits beyond a lively appreciation of Her Majesty's benefactions ; and she invoked her patronage of herself, her family, and that daughter who had been so distinguished as to be considered worthy to accompany her mother to the Court of Her Majesty.

Elizabeth replied : " All I have done for you is nothing in comparison with what I would wish to do for your family. My own blood is not dearer to me than yours. My intentions will ever remain the same, and my friendship shall be judged by my deeds and the favours I shall bestow on all of you."

After again embracing the Princess Sophia, the Empress took the Princesses into her bed-chamber ; here she carefully scrutinized the features of the mother, whose resemblance to her late brother, to whom the Empress had been betrothed, was so striking, that Elizabeth hastily withdrew into another apartment in order to conceal the tears which she was unable to repress. As soon as she had succeeded in overcoming her emotions, she graciously rejoined her guests, and the conversation was continued. The Empress was reported to be enchanted with them.

They had not been a day in Moscow before the Empress conferred the Order of St. Catherine on mother and daughter. They were made dames of the Order on the 10th February, the Grand-Duke Peter's birthday, and the Empress represented that this distinction had been conferred on them at the special request of the Grand-Duke. The investiture was made the occasion for a grand ceremonial, at which the principal court dignitaries, including Lestocq, were present.

The poor Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst was completely dazzled by the brilliancy and luxury of the Court. She and her daughter were given two chamberlains, two grooms of the chamber, four pages, and a number of attendants. They always drove out in state, and the Princess was beside herself with joy.

In the *Memoirs* of Catherine the Court at the time of her arrival is admirably described. It was divided into two parties, one of which was led by the Vice-Chancellor, Count Bestoujeff-Ryoutin, who was much more feared than loved. Astute and suspicious, firm and unshakable in his opinions, and rather despotic, he was a pitiless enemy, but a good and loyal friend to his adherents as long as they remained loyal to him ; never-

theless, he was inclined to be petty and very intractable. Chief of the College of Foreign Affairs, as it was quaintly called, he was the partisan of Austria, Saxony, and England, and the arrival of the Anhalt-Zerbst Princesses was not at all to his taste, for their visit had been arranged in opposition to his party and had been kept secret from him. Although he had a large number of enemies, he inspired them all with fear. Both in position and character he was far above them, and towered head and shoulders over these political lackeys.

The party opposed to him favoured France, Sweden, and Prussia. The soul of this party was the Marquis de la Chetardie, and its principal supporters those courtiers who had been imported from Holstein. They had won over Lestocq, who enjoyed the complete confidence of the Empress, whose physician he had been since the death of her mother, whom he had likewise attended. He is described in the *Memoirs* as able, adroit, and cunning, but of a malignant temper and possessed of a black and wicked heart. These foreigners had put forward Count Michael Vorontzoff as their leader, he had escorted the Empress during the eventful night on which she raised herself to the throne, and she had married him to Countess Anne Skavronski, the niece of Catherine I, who had grown up with Elizabeth and was devoted to her. Another supporter of this party was Count Alexander Roumyantzeff, and the powerful and numerous Troubetzkoy family was also counted as belonging thereto. Through them the Prince of Hessen-Homburg was an adherent, who, although greatly respected, was in reality a nonentity.

The Shouvaloff family competed with Roumyantzeff, the favourite and reputedmorganatic husband of Elizabeth, and Count Bestoujeff knew how to make use of the Shouvaloffs. His chief support was, however, Baron Tcherkassoff, a "fledgling" of Peter the Great's, a stern and obstinate man, exacting and just.

From this we can gather that Bestoujeff-Ryoumin was the most salient personality at this motley Court. With a quiet but confident step, his head slightly raised, he unobtrusively pursued his way in the crowd which feared and hated him as much as he despised and never spared it. He had ever refused to bow the knee, either to Peter I or to Peter's daughter, but had made his

way solely by dint of his ability and capacity for work. He had defects and vices, for he was a man of the time, but he had also great qualities. On the other hand, he was said to be corrupt; Frederick the Great was, for instance, of the opinion that he would sell anything for money, and would even have sold the Empress herself if anybody could have been found to pay a sufficient price for her. But, as Bilbassoff astutely points out, if he had really been so corrupt, Frederick would most certainly have bought him. Bestoujeff, however, elected on the contrary to espouse the cause of Austria, in spite of the fact that the hated Ostermann had followed a similar policy. Indeed, in the *Memoirs* of Catherine there is a passage to the effect that he was never won over by money. The esteem in which he was held by foreign diplomatists was not great. Schlözer describes him as the Grand-Vizier of his country, so great was his power, and adds that his character was so monstrous a medley of odious qualities that there could be no fear of exaggerating the picture; he was not, he says, a great genius, but an accomplished intriguer.

By the advent of the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst the number of those who hated the great Russian statesman was increased, for she was instructed by Frederick to do all she could to bring about his fall. This Princess was thirty-two when she arrived in Russia, and without being beautiful she was certainly very attractive. Always bright and cheerful, amiable to all, and accustomed to take the lead in her small provincial circle, she proceeded with typical levity to take the rôle assigned her by Bestoujeff's enemies. Apparently forgetting the real object of her visit, the Princess took herself very seriously, held important political conversations with the Empress, endeavoured to influence the Grand-Duke, discussed with some, whispered to others, conducted a voluminous correspondence, and generally tried by fussing and meddling to make herself out to be a person of importance. Unfortunately for her, as we shall presently see, her shoulders were scarcely broad enough to support the weight of political intrigue thus placed on them.

The Princess Sophia seems, on the other hand, to have made a good impression on everybody. "Our daughter," the mother writes to the Prince, "meets with general approbation. The Empress caresses her, the Grand-Duke likes her, the matter is

settled." This letter was written nine days after the arrival in Moscow of the two Princesses. And, indeed, everybody was pleased with the young Princess Sophia, everybody loved her. On the journey she appears to have familiarized herself with the idea that she was going to a country which was to become a second Fatherland, and immediately on her arrival she seems to have put forth all her efforts to endeavour to deserve the high destiny which was being prepared for her.

The Grand-Duke Peter was delighted with his cousin; he was only sixteen and she but a year younger, and he was glad to have a companion with whom he could converse freely and without restraint, whom he could take into his confidence and with whom he could exchange ideas, chatter irresponsibly, whom he could tell his secrets, his intentions, and communicate his cherished plans and longings without asking leave of his tutors.

But Sophia was, as we have seen, a serious young person and was not content to spend her days in frivolity. She recognized that her first preoccupation must be to master the difficult Russian language and to study the mysteries of the Orthodox Greek religion. In her zealous application she would get up at night to study the lessons she had been set, and, neglecting to put on her slippers, would pace the bare boards of her room in the bitter cold of the Russian winter, forgetful of comfort and hardship in her enthusiasm and self-oblivion. She caught a bad cold, and her mother, with fatalistic pessimism, immediately jumped to the conclusion that she must be sickening for small-pox, and scolded her for making a fuss and not bearing her illness quietly. The doctors wanted to bleed her, but her mother would not permit this, protesting that her brother had died in Russia simply in consequence of being bled whilst he had small-pox. Meanwhile the poor little Princess was lying unconscious. The Empress Elizabeth was away on a pilgrimage to Troitzza, a religious exercise in which she was very fond of indulging, these pilgrimages being always conducted in the most comfortable, not to say luxurious, conditions. Immediately on her return the Empress proceeded to Princess Sophia's bedside, accompanied by Lestocq and other doctors. The Princess was still unconscious. Elizabeth, after listening to the medical evidence, at once ordered the Princess to be bled, whereupon she was in-

stantly restored to consciousness. For twenty-seven days, we are told in the *Memoirs*, the Princess lay between life and death ; she was bled sixteen times, but her mother was mercifully not allowed to go near her. At last an abscess at the right side burst, the Princess vomited, and turned the corner. Her mother in a letter to her father relates how the Empress held her in her arms whilst she was being bled, and rewarded her for her patience and courage by giving her a handsome necklace and ear-rings worth Rs.20,000, whilst the Grand-Duke gave her a watch set in diamonds and rubies.

Wyck in a dispatch to his Government reported that the young Princess of Zerbst had been dangerously ill of an inflammation of the lungs ; " and the seventeenth day of her sickness she was without hope, when her impostume broke in her breast, which gave her immediate ease, and she is now in a fair way to recovery." Indeed, on the 27th March she was already much better, and on the 20th April she was able to leave her room.

During her illness the young Princess endeared herself to all who came in contact with her. The reputed cause of her malady, her zeal in trying to master the Russian language, would alone have sufficed to make her popular. Moreover, it was reported that when she was lying at death's door her mother wanted her to have the comforts of religion and desired to send for a Lutheran pastor, but when Sophia regained consciousness and was told of this she is reported to have expressed a preference for a Russian priest, a certain Todorsky, who had studied at Halle and who had been commissioned to instruct her in the tenets of the Orthodox Church. At her request he was sent for and she conversed with him in the presence of others, much to the gratification of the Empress and her whole Court. Indeed, the emotional Empress frequently wept over the Princess, and the Grand-Duke was in a state of despair during her indisposition.

The person who suffered most by this unfortunate illness was the mother of Princess Sophia. Her screams and protestations against the bleeding of her daughter, which had after all saved Sophia's life, and her general behaviour lowered her in the public estimation. There is the famous story of the blue and silver brocade, which Sophia's uncle had presented to his niece, and which her mother asked her to give her. Sophia, who had been

placed in the care of Countess Roumyantzeff, and was not allowed to see her mother, because it seems the latter worried and upset her so, sent word that whilst she would be pleased to let her mother have the brocade, she was very fond of it herself, nevertheless she caused the material to be transmitted to her. This incident appears to have caused great indignation at Court, and the Empress on hearing of it immediately sent the young invalid a number of very handsome pieces of brocade, amongst which was also one in blue and silver.

All this did not put Sophia's mother in the most favourable light. In the meantime it is of course unnecessary to say that the course of the young Princess's illness was most anxiously watched by the various parties of the Court. The various diplomatic envoys received the latest intelligence of her health with the greatest variety of feelings. Whilst her supporters trembled at the least unfavourable news, the hopes of her opponents rose as her own chances of recovery seemed to wane. But the Empress Elizabeth dashed all these aspirations to the ground by declaring to Brümmer and Lestocq, that if she were to have the misfortune to lose this cherished child, the devil should take her if she allowed the Saxon Princess to benefit thereby.

This extremely vigorous but straightforward language gave all the courtiers "furiously to think," and they concluded that the beautiful Princess of Hesse-Darmstadt would have the next chance. The politic Brümmer actually indited a letter for that quarter which, if anything, exceeded in subserviency his previous epistle to the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst.

But the Empress did not despair of the convalescence of Princess Sophia, and loaded her with presents. Among other things she, quaintly enough, gave her a beautiful snuff-box set in brilliants.

On the 21st April, her birthday, Sophia was so far recovered as to be able to receive the congratulations of the Court. A dinner for forty persons was served in her suite, which was followed by a ball, at which foreign diplomatists were present. This was not only Princess Sophia's first ball, it was her first appearance in public. She was as thin as a skeleton, according to the *Memoirs*, her face and all her features had lengthened, she had grown, but her hair had fallen out and she was deathly

pale. She did not know herself, and the Empress, in the kindness of her heart, sent her a pot of rouge. She had already presented the mother with the engagement ring originally intended for her fiancé, and had informed her of her intentions regarding the Grand-Duke and Princess Sophia.

With the approach of spring the latter now rapidly recovered her health, whilst her mother, out of respect for so great a horse-woman and monarch as the Empress; took lessons in riding, and the Grand-Duke, who spent his days out of doors, came to see his intended at dinner and supper and took her into his boyish confidence, and displayed a frankness which has been justly described as childish. He told the young Princess that what he liked most in her was that he was able to converse with her, being his cousin, without restraint, as with a relation. He told her that he was in love with the daughter of the beautiful Mme Lopoukhine, whose pathetic story is one of the blots on the fame of Elizabeth. This woman, of whom the Empress is believed to have been inclined to be jealous, was suspected and accused of being implicated in a conspiracy against her. She was tried and sentenced to be put to death. The humane Empress would not, however, allow capital punishment in her dominions, and so the sentence was mercifully commuted. The lady was publicly knouted (flogged with an instrument of torture called a pleyt), had her tongue cut out, flung, a piece of quivering and bleeding flesh, on a cart, and banished to Siberia. Her daughter was of course removed from Court; and so the Grand-Duke informed his cousin that, as this young lady had been taken away, he would not mind, seeing he could not have Miss Lopoukhine, marrying Princess Sophia—a piece of intelligence which brought the colour to that Princess's cheeks as she thanked him for his confidence.

However, it was not until the 1st of May that Major Vessellofsky was dispatched to Zerbst with a letter from the Empress to Prince Christian Augustus, in which, after praising the exceptional qualities of his daughter, she officially asked him to give his consent and blessing to the marriage of the Grand-Duke and heir to the Russian throne and the Princess Sophia, and to her adoption of the Orthodox Greek faith.

Meanwhile the mother, the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst, enjoyed herself consumedly and saw much company, gathering round her,

in addition to the Marquis de la Chetardie, Mardefeldt, Lestocq, and Count Brümmer, the members of the Troubetzkoy family, especially the wife of the Prince of Hessen-Homburg and others of that set. Sophia took little interest in the talk of these "elders," but these conversations were a source of displeasure to those who took no part in them, and especially to Count Bestoujeff-Ryounin.

In the *Memoirs* there is a description of a visit to the Troitza Monastery in the June of 1744, when the Zerbst Princesses were accommodated in the "Imperial Cells," and it is recorded that after dinner, when the Grand-Duke had come to pay them his respects, the Empress Elizabeth appeared unexpectedly and ordered the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst, Sophia's mother, to follow her into another room, whither Count Lestocq also adjourned. Sophia and the Grand-Duke sat in the window-seat chatting and awaiting the return of the others. The conversation in the adjoining room continued for a considerable time; at last Count Lestocq returned, and, seeing the young people laughing, exclaimed: "This great happiness will soon come to an end," then, turning to Princess Sophia, he added: "There is nothing left for you but to pack up your things; you will immediately start on your journey and return home."

The Grand-Duke wanted to know what had happened, and Lestocq replied, "You will know later," and with these words left the room.

Presently the door was flung open and the Empress, very red in the face, and apparently in a great rage, came in followed by the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst, who had evidently been weeping.

The young people jumped off their lofty perch in the window-sill, and the Empress was so amused at the sight that she burst out laughing, kissed them both and left the room.

What had happened was that the ciphered dispatches of the Marquis de la Chetardie had been intercepted and deciphered by a henchman of Bestoujeff-Ryounin's. The Marquis, who was the French Envoy, was intriguing against the Vice-Chancellor and the Russian party at Court, with the object of getting Russia under the tutelage of France. In this laudable endeavour the Marquis had played a part beyond his talents, and he had, moreover, in his dispatches permitted himself to make references to the

Empress which were the reverse of flattering to that august monarch. He had further spoken very freely about the Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst and the rôle of Prussian spy which she had voluntarily adopted. It appeared that the mother of Princess Sophia conducted a voluminous correspondence with Frederick II, endeavoured to undermine the excellent relations of the Empress with Austria, carried on *pourparlers* with the Swedish Government, worked for an alliance with Prussia, and sent off under cover of her letters a number of secret papers. She was the court agent of de la Chetardie and of Mardefeldt, on account of her having easy access to the Empress. She intrigued against the Vice-Chancellor, interested herself in the Brunswick family, and hinted to the Empress that her throne was far from safe. In short, and speaking generally, the petty provincial Princess took herself seriously and was playing a big political game, but was perhaps scarcely experienced enough for the ambitious part which she had vain-gloriously assumed. Hence the stormy interview. However, Lestocq's prophecy was not to be immediately fulfilled. Sophia and her mother were not packed off to Zerbst, but the latter was treated with increasing coolness by the Empress. Lord Tyrawly noticed that "the Princess of Zerbst has been in tears for some days passt," but the Princess did not deem it necessary to inform her soldierly husband in Prussia of her injudicious political activity. Mardefeldt was trying to bring about a triple alliance of Russia, Prussia, and Sweden, and the ill-advised Princess of Zerbst had, according to Lord Tyrawly, "pressed her Imp. Majesty to conclude this treaty, but the Empress had silenced her in a very short manner, by telling her it looked very ill in her to meddle in things that did not concern her, and the Empress desired that answer might be a lesson to her for the future." In another dispatch he says: "At present the Empress seems very weary of the Anhalt family."

But the Empress was able to distinguish between the clumsy diplomacy and vulgar arrogance of the mother, and the sweetness and loyalty of the daughter. The young Princess and the Grand-Duke had in the meantime grown so intimate that they had actually invented a lover's language of their own, and whilst they thought their harmless philandering was a dead secret, it was really patent to all. At dinner they drank each other's health

"in Russian," but the Grand-Duke knowingly told the Saxon Envoy that this really meant "God grant that what we desire may soon be brought about." Indeed, Princess Sophia had already so great an influence on the Grand-Duke that Count Brümmer used to ask her to endeavour to correct certain faults and failings to which the youth was prone.

On the 13th June the enemies of Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, who had tried to poison the mind of the Empress against him, and had been working to bring about his disgrace, must have been edified to learn that he had been promoted to the post of Grand-Chancellor of the Empire.

A day earlier Major Vesseloffsky had returned from Zerbst bearing the consent of the Prince to his daughter's marriage and change of religion. The Prince's Protestantism had not been proof against the dazzling prospect of seeing his daughter on the throne of Russia, but his sober German prudence led him to stipulate that proper provision should be made for her possible widowhood, and he threw out hints about estates in Holstein or Livonia.

It seems that the Grand-Duke was beside himself and jumped and skipped for joy. The Princess of Zerbst, writing to her husband, says: "I never imagined that the Grand-Duke, who could not have doubted that you would give your consent, would have been touched by your letter to such an extent. If all the wishes which your future son-in-law expresses are carried into effect you will be happy for ever afterwards."

Princess Sophia had been brought up in the belief that there was no salvation except by faith, as interpreted by Luther, and while she knew that outside the Protestant religion there existed an idolatrous Popish Church, she had heard nothing of the Greek Orthodox faith.

Mindful of the "Instructions" handed her by Prince Christian Augustus, her mother had, on her arrival in Moscow, sounded the Empress as to whether it might not be possible for Sophia to retain her religion in the same manner as in the case of the wife of Alexis, the son of Peter I. But the Empress Elizabeth categorically rejected such an idea, adding that the difference between the Greek and the Protestant religions was not as great as was generally believed. The Empress recommended Sophia's mother to discuss this matter with Archimandrite Todorsky, who

was the religious instructor of the Grand-Duke, and expressed her conviction that she would be satisfied this was the case. This proposed conversation resulted in a remarkable letter to the Prince, in which his wife says : " I swear to you before God that I found no delusions in their faith." She naïvely adds that the canons of the Orthodox Church expounded the same fundamental doctrines as the catechism of Luther, although there were considerable differences in outward forms and ritual. As the father's " Instructions " had left the final decision to his daughter's conscience, the mother informed the Prince that Sophia, after carefully studying the tenets of the Orthodox faith, had found nothing repugnant in it, but had on the contrary become satisfied that the Orthodox religion was a saving faith.

Todorsky, the Archimandrite referred to, was, it is needless to say, a highly cultured and most accomplished priest. After going through the usual course of the Russian theological academies, he had, before taking Holy Orders, proceeded to Halle and studied at that university at a time when the mathematical teachings of Christian Wolf had excited considerable controversy. Wolf had been expelled at the instance of the pietistic Professor Lange, but had stirred up the intellectual forces of the university. On Todorsky the conflict of the two schools of thought exercised a remarkable influence ; he returned to Russia with profound convictions, and placed the spiritual meaning of Christianity above the formalities of external worship. The Saxon Envoy had a very poor opinion of the theology of Todorsky, whilst the Princess of Zerbst was convinced that he was really a Lutheran. For so accomplished and broad-minded a divine the conversion of little Sophia must have been, as indeed it was, an easy matter. In writing to her father she stated that there were great differences in the external forms of the two religions, but these were explained by the ignorance of the people.

Of course it is quite unnecessary to point out that the Greek Orthodox faith, which assigns so large and prominent a place to a very beautiful and wide conception of the doctrine of charity, has but very little in common with the strict Protestant teaching of salvation by faith alone with which the name of Luther is more particularly associated.

However, Prince Christian Augustus was a plain-thinking

soldier, and no fanatic. He wrote his wife a charming letter in which he admitted that the Greek Church was the first pure apostolic Church, but added that he could not conceal from himself that its pristine purity had been greatly impaired by subsequent errors and ritualism. Nevertheless, he again repeated that he saw no objection to allowing his daughter perfect freedom in the choice of her religion. In a very earnest letter to the latter he implored her to search her heart faithfully and examine herself to see whether she was not animated by worldly or frivolous motives, or whether she had not been over-persuaded by the kindness and benevolent intentions of the Empress.

Sophia announced her decision in simple but dutiful language. She assured her father that his wishes would always be hers, and that nobody would ever be able to make her fail in her duty to him. She invoked his blessing and informed him that she had found scarcely any difference between the teachings of the Lutheran and the Greek religions, and had therefore determined, subject to his instructions, to change her religion. She promised to send him her confession of faith by next post.

Todorsky undoubtedly deserved great credit for his tact and diplomacy, though, considering the youth of his convert and what was at stake, it may be taken for granted that the conscientious scruples of the young Princess were not exceptionally hard to overcome.

The conversion and marriage of Princess Sophia of Zerbst now became the subject of animated correspondence among the members of her family who had never viewed the proposed alliance with favour. The unhappy fate of Princess Charlotte of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, the deserted wife of the Grand-Duke Alexis, was still fresh in people's memories. Sad and disquieting intelligence still reached Germany concerning the melancholy condition of the exiled survivors of the "Brunswick Dynasty," who were kept moving from one Russian fortress to another.

Nor does it appear that the dazzling splendours of the Russian throne entirely blinded the eyes of Princess Sophia herself to the dangers and troubles in store for her. At this time the poor child of fifteen was frequently found in tears, and no doubt she had many misgivings and gloomy forebodings. But her mother turned a deaf ear to the remonstrances of her husband's relations,

and shut her eyes to her daughter's tears. This exemplary woman and worldly, plotting, political intriguer, probably regarding the sacrifice of her daughter as a step to her own aggrandizement, piously deprecated all opposition to the will of Providence.

And so the 28th June was appointed as the day for the solemn reception of the Zerbst Princess into the Orthodox faith, and the 29th for her betrothal. From the 26th, Princess Sophia did not appear in public. She fasted on the 27th, and in the night between the 27th and 28th, overcome by fatigue, she slept "like a log."

On Wednesday the 28th of June, attired in an Adrienne gown of ruby *gros de Tours*, embroidered in silver at the seams, and without any ornaments in her unpowdered hair, with the exception of a white ribbon, the appearance of Princess Sophia created a sensation. At ten o'clock the members of the Senate, the higher court officials, and the nobles and generals arrived at the palace. The Holy Synod awaited the arrival of the exalted personages in the palace chapel. After receiving the benediction, the Princess repeated the articles of faith in a firm voice and with a faultless Russian enunciation. The Empress Elizabeth, in honour of her own mother, and as her sponsor, gave her the name of Catherine, and from henceforth she was to be known to the world by that name. The dignity and earnestness of her deportment excited universal admiration. As usual on such solemn and impressive occasions everybody wept, from the Empress Elizabeth downwards. After the ceremony the Empress presented her godchild with a suite of costly jewellery. The ordeal had nevertheless been severe, and her mother wrote that her daughter retired to rest whilst the others were having dinner.

As that day was also the saint's day of the Grand-Duke Peter, the whole party proceeded to his apartments in the evening, and the young Princess presented him with a complete hunting outfit set in emeralds and brilliants.

Early on the morning on Thursday, the 29th June, Lestocq waited upon the Princess Catherine and handed her a diamond bracelet with the portraits in miniature of the Empress and of the Grand-Duke. The betrothal was celebrated in the famous Uspensky Cathedral. The Bishop who performed the ceremony announced in a loud voice the bestowal of the title of Grand-Duchess upon the betrothed. This her mother tortured into

meaning that she had been given an hereditary right to the throne, an interpretation which, though adopted by several Russian historians, Bilbassoff exposes as erroneous, not to say mendacious.

After the church service there was a big reception, at which the bride and bridegroom received the congratulations of the Court, and later, at two o'clock, a dinner at which Catherine was for the first time seated on a throne. In the evening there was a gala supper and ball, which did not terminate until two in the morning.

The Grand-Duchess Catherine, as the affianced bride of the heir apparent, now took up a very different position, and was given a household of her own. She now took precedence of her mother, who wrote to her husband to say that : " In her new position our daughter behaves with great discretion, and blushes whenever she has to go in front of me."

The Empress allowed her Rs.30,000 pin-money.

It would appear that the Empress removed her as much as possible from the influence of her mother, whose friendship with the Prince of Hessen-Homburg was little to her liking, and whose relations with Betzkoy were getting her talked about.

Towards the end of July the Court proceeded on a pilgrimage to Kieff. After a leisurely journey extending over three weeks they arrived at Kozeltz, where the party were accommodated in the palatial residence of Count Rasoumovsky, Catherine and her mother occupying one room. Here occurred a regrettable incident. The Grand-Duke, impelled by curiosity, wanted to rummage in a box belonging to Catherine's mother; that lady requested him not to touch it. In impish fun the Grand-Duke jumped round the box and then jumped into an extreme corner of the room. In the course of these antics, which he performed to amuse Catherine, the lid of the box became undone. The mother lost her temper, scolded the Grand-Duke, and told him he had upset the box on purpose. Catherine took his part, whereupon the mother turned on her daughter and brought her to tears. The Grand-Duke took Catherine's part, and her mother called him an ill-behaved boy. In short, there was a scene which threatened to end in fisticuffs.

On the 29th of August the party entered Kieff. They were met at the bridge over the Dniepr by a distinguished old man (really a student in disguise) representing the ancient princely founder of the town. He was seated in a chariot drawn by two students disguised as winged horses, and welcomed the Empress in an ornate oration as his successor. The Court remained about a fortnight in Kieff, where Catherine was highly interested in the curious religious life she saw, and on the 8th September the return journey to Moscow was undertaken.

In Moscow there occurred another extraordinary incident. One day at the play, whilst Catherine was sitting in a box with her mother and the Grand-Duke, she observed the Empress and Lestocq in the box opposite, and noticed that they were holding an animated conversation. Presently Lestocq entered their box and informed Catherine that the Empress had been talking about her and was very indignant with her on account of her extravagance and because she had so many debts. He then left them, Catherine having been brought to tears. The Grand-Duke, however, who had heard every word, gave her to understand that he fully shared the views expressed by Lestocq. This, it seems, was his method of currying favour with the Empress. Catherine's mother, on the other hand, said this was the inevitable result of the removal of her daughter from her influence, and washed her hands of the whole business. Catherine immediately decided to examine her accounts and ascertained that she owed Rs.17,000. Before the departure from Moscow to Kieff, the Empress had given her Rs.15,000, so that her "unsecured liabilities" did not amount to more than Rs.2000, which she did not think an excessive sum.

The *Memoirs* give a variety of reasons for her extravagances. In the first place, her wardrobe was a very poor one on her arrival in Russia, where ladies changed their dresses three times a day. Her linen consisted of a dozen shifts, and she had to sleep between her mother's sheets. Secondly, she had been told that Russians loved presents, and that friends could only be made by means of generous gifts. Thirdly, the Countess Roumyantzeff, who had been given her as her attendant, was the most extravagant woman in the whole empire, and was constantly recommending her to make purchases. Finally, both the Grand-Duke and her

mother were a heavy drain upon her purse, as they had to be constantly propitiated by presents.

The Grand-Duke, who had been ailing for some time, now had an attack of pleurisy and was confined to his room, where, to amuse him, the Empress sent him one of her ladies-in-waiting to tell him stories from the *Arabian Nights*, whilst Catherine arranged for Italians to come and sing to him, and obtained permission for him to play instruments.

Presently, however, the true nature of his malady declared itself: he had contracted chicken-pox. The only people who grieved for the young Prince were the Empress and Catherine. The mother of the latter was too much absorbed in political intrigues and in her correspondence with Frederick II of Prussia to give much time to the patient. Indeed, while the Grand-Duke was lying ill in bed she was corresponding with Mardefeldt regarding the choice of a new husband for her daughter in the event of Peter's death.

The Empress, who took the greatest precautions not to catch the Grand-Duke's complaint, nevertheless had the courage to pay him frequent visits, but she always carefully washed herself after seeing him, and changed all her clothes. For all that, she would not run the risk of communicating the contagion to Catherine, and did not see her until the Grand-Duke's health was completely restored.

He was still very weak and delicate when it was decided in the middle of December to move the Court to St. Petersburg.

On the journey the Grand-Duke developed small-pox. The Empress embraced Catherine, and the two wept together over the melancholy turn of affairs.

At St. Petersburg mother and daughter were allotted two separate sets of apartments, each set composed of four rooms, in a house adjoining the palace. The Princess of Zerbst seems to have been very discontented with the accommodation given her, and vented her spleen on her daughter. Whilst the maternal attitude thus grew less and less affectionate, the isolated Catherine spent her time in copying Russian letters which had been composed for her by others, and signing and sending them to the Empress, who was delighted with the wonderful progress she was making.

At this time there arrived in St. Petersburg an embassy from Sweden, and amongst those who composed it was that Count Gyllenborg who had seen the Princess in Hamburg and had reproached her mother for neglecting her. He had always taken an interest in "Figgey," and had said that she had a philosophical mind. Finding how greatly she had developed and grown, mentally and physically, he recommended her a course of study—Plutarch's Lives, the Life of Cicero, and Montesquieu's Roman Republic. These she obtained, but as her sceptical biographer, Bilbassoff, cautiously suggests, it is more than probable that she did not read them, for she had other things to think of, although she asked Count Gyllenborg to give her a philosophic description of her character, which it appears he did, but which Catherine tore up later in life.

In the following February the Empress, who had brought the Grand-Duke to Tzarskoye Selo, arrived with him at St. Petersburg and received the visits of Catherine and her mother. Catherine was, it seems, horrified at the sight of her unhappy fiancé, who, never particularly attractive, was unrecognizable. He had grown considerably, but his features had become much coarser, the small-pox had left its cruel traces, and as his hair had been clipped, he wore a huge wig. Approaching Catherine he asked her whether she knew him again. The poor little philosopher of fifteen did her best to hide her feelings as she congratulated on his recovery the future husband who looked so hideous.

The Empress Elizabeth seemed to sympathize with Catherine's feelings and now did all she could to console her. On the day of the Grand-Duke's birthday she dined on her throne, with the Grand-Duchess Catherine for her sole companion on it; the Grand-Duke himself did not appear in public on that occasion nor for some time to come, for it was believed to be undesirable to show him to the people, frightfully disfigured as he now was. During the ensuing festivities Catherine had precedence before everybody after the Empress. Moreover, in order to introduce an element of brightness into the rather secluded and sombre life of the young Grand-Duchess, Elizabeth attached to her person four young and merry Russian girls, the eldest of whom was no more than twenty. These children, for they were little more,

used in the evening to play at blindman's buff and similar games with Catherine. They all belonged to the highest Russian nobility, but were in mortal dread of the Countess Roumyantzeff, who was so addicted to cards that she played from morning to night and very rarely interfered in their diversions.

CHAPTER IV

THE GRAND-DUKE

THE Grand-Duke Charles Peter, whose hand Catherine was destined to have the happiness to obtain, was a grandson of Peter the Great, for, as we have seen, his mother, Anne, was the daughter of Catherine I, the second wife of the first Emperor of all the Russias. The earlier rulers of Muscovy had been solely known by the title of Tsar, which, like Kaiser, is supposed to be a corruption of Cæsar.

The young Prince, who first saw the light on the 10th/21st of February 1728, cannot be said to have been born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He was a poor and weakly child from the first. His mother died three months later, apparently from consumption, and shortly afterwards the child fell ill, and never really recovered his health ; he was delicate and sickly.

Until he was seven years of age he was under the care of women, who taught him the French language. In 1735 he was handed over to certain officers of the Holstein Guards. He was instructed in military exercises, made to march and taught how to handle a musket, and given the rank of sergeant. He did orderly duty, attended inspections and reviews, and betrayed a love of soldiering which amounted to a mania. If, during his lessons, troops marched past, or a review was held, he would throw his books on one side, rush to the window, and feast his eyes on the soldiers. By way of punishment the windows were covered up in order to prevent him from looking out. As the unfortunate Grand-Duke was heir presumptive to the Swedish as well as the Russian throne, he was alternately instructed in the Russian and the Swedish languages according as his chances of succession seemed brightest in either the one or the other country. In the same way his religious education was entrusted alternately

to the court-chaplain, Hosemann, and to a Russian priest who had been the chaplain of his mother. The child was also taught Latin, a language in which his father was able to converse with fluency, but, beyond a loathing for the classics, the boy acquired scarcely any knowledge, in spite of the strenuous efforts of the rector of the Kiel Grammar School.

On his arrival in Russia the Empress expressed her astonishment at the ignorance of the Grand-Duke, who had been taught nothing in his native land. Indeed, he was but three months old when his mother died, and his father, who had never been very domesticated, left a gay widower at twenty-eight, had but little time for his son, and spent most of his days in barracks and among his soldiers—this love of soldiering was the only bond between them. The one red-letter day in his childhood which remained indelibly impressed on the young Grand-Duke's memory was the day on which he was promoted from the rank of sergeant to that of second or sub-lieutenant. It was on the occasion of the birthday of the reigning Duke, which was celebrated with the usual solemnity, and by a gala dinner. The little Prince had to take his stand with the other sergeants at the doors of the banqueting hall whilst the banquet was proceeding. This unusual spectacle of other people eating, while he had nothing, was too much of an ordeal for the little Prince, who had been accustomed to take his meals with his father, and he broke down and wept bitterly. The Duke was amused at the child's tears, and drew the attention of his guests to the boy's unhappy appearance. At the second course he ordered him to be relieved, congratulated him on his promotion to the rank of sub-lieutenant, and ordered him, in his new capacity, to take a seat at the table. The child was so overcome with joy that he was unable to touch any food.

This occurred in 1738; in the following year, 1739, the Duke died, and Prince Adolphus Frederick, the uncle of Catherine, became Regent, and the guardian of the boy. He did not, however, take much interest in his charge, but handed him over to the care of the Grand-Chamberlain, von Brümmer, who is reputed to have been the lover of Anne, and the real father of Peter, and who became later one of the numerous favourites of the Empress Elizabeth. Bilbassoff describes Brümmer as a malignant schemer, a man of no refinement or culture, but a shameless debauchee

who was at that time entirely under the influence of a certain Mme Brockdorff, who played a conspicuous rôle in the administration of the Duchy of Holstein. Brümmer was a cavalry officer and a magnificent horseman, but very little qualified to superintend the education of the young Duke—indeed, he did not even take the trouble to be present at his charge's lessons, pleading that the remuneration allowed him was too inadequate to admit of his devoting so much of his time to his pupil. The influence he exercised on the young Duke, both morally and physically, must be described as harmful in the highest degree. The child was far from robust and constantly ailing, but he was not allowed any food before two in the afternoon, and was frequently so famished that he voraciously ate anything he could get hold of, even dry bread. When Brümmer, on his arrival to dinner, received bad reports of the boy from his masters, he used to threaten to punish him severely after meals, and these threats had so terrifying an effect on the child that he would sit at table half dead with fright, unable to take a morsel of food, and seized with violent headaches and fits of vomiting and biliousness. By way of punishment the puny infant had often to go without his dinner. Shortly before his departure for Russia the young Grand-Duke was, for some offence, condemned to stand at the open door of his room whilst dinner was proceeding in the adjoining apartment, a painting of a donkey was hung round his neck, a rod placed in his hand, and thus he had to look on whilst the others were at dinner. He had frequently to kneel with his bare knees on hard peas, until his knees were red and inflamed. Sometimes his tormentors tied him to a table, and he was constantly being birched and caned. This injudicious upbringing did not improve his character, and he must have been exasperatingly irritating. Brümmer, who had no affection for the child, is reported to have told him, on losing his temper on one occasion, that he would have him flogged till the dogs licked up his blood from the ground.

While little Figgey was playing about in the town garden of Stettin with her young friends, her future husband was being kept a sort of prisoner. Even in the finest midsummer weather he was scarcely permitted to take the air. The Prince was kept at his lessons all day until six in the evening, and then he was

frequently prohibited from going out, but had to play quadrille with the daughter of Mme Brockdorff. At eight he had supper, and after supper he was sent to bed. Moreover, he was always treated more or less brutally, and this seems to have brutalized his nature. When he was in his eleventh year he was already made to carry himself and behave like a grown-up person. He was early taught the restraints and insincerities of a Court, and all this had a baneful effect.

The following anecdote recorded by Solovieff is typical of the treatment he received. A young fellow, a relative of Mme Brockdorff, got drunk at a certain entertainment. The little Duke, on discovering traces of his condition in the ball-room, told Mme Brockdorff's daughter of this and advised her to recommend her relative to go home. The young lady indignantly replied that he had no right to order her about, and that these matters were within the province of the Grand-Chamberlain, to whom she would complain of the Duke's conduct. The Duke was annoyed and requested a friend of Mme Brockdorff to inform her that he expected her to reprimand her daughter for her behaviour, and that in the event of her not doing so he did not desire to see the mother or her daughter at his Court any more. Mme Brockdorff went in a fury to Brümmer and complained to him of what the Duke had said, with the result that the latter received a sound thrashing with a riding-switch, and had then to make an abject apology to Mme Brockdorff.

Even in Russia, when Peter had been made Grand-Duke and heir apparent, Brümmer treated him harshly and with contempt. This led to frequent incidents, for the Grand-Duke had acquired the art of quick and cutting repartee, and knew how to defend himself against the unjust accusations and coarse expressions of Brümmer.

The following scene, for instance, is reported to have taken place at Peterhof in 1744. On one occasion the quarrel between the two had reached such a pitch that Brümmer, mad with rage, doubled his fists and was about to fall on the Grand-Duke, had not those in the room intervened and prevented the outrage and averted the blow. The Grand-Duke threw himself on a sofa, but immediately jumped up again and opened the window with the intention of summoning the grenadiers from the guard-



PETER III

room to arrest Brümmer. He was, however, dissuaded from doing this, and ran into his sleeping apartment, returning with a sword which he drew in Brümmer's face, threatening to plunge it into the latter's body if ever again he ventured to lay hands on him.

The Empress Elizabeth's first care, after discovering the ignorance of her heir, was to provide him with a tutor. Her choice fell on Stehling, whom she introduced to her nephew with the words: "I have noticed that your Highness frequently suffers from tedium, and that there are still many excellent things for you to learn, and for this reason I present to you a man who will entertain you with useful and agreeable matters."

Stehling had been imported from Saxony in 1735 and had been appointed Professor of Elocution and Poetry to the Imperial Academy of St. Petersburg. His duties appear to have been varied. At the Academy he delivered public lectures to Russian and German students on the history of literature, on elocution, oratory, and rhetoric, on the natural and moral sciences, on criticism and philosophy. He gave private lessons in German, philosophy, and logic, and composed congratulatory odes on public events, the New Year, the Coronation, birthdays, victories, and conclusions of peace. He published descriptions of illuminations and fireworks, designed vignettes for books and maps, worked in the museum, arranged the library, devised medals, translated operas, kept the court journal, catalogued pictures, conducted an orchestra, and was, generally speaking, a sort of handy-man about the place in respect of all matters connected with learning of any kind whatsoever.

To this Admirable Crichton the education of the Grand-Duke was confided. He was an adaptable pedagogue, and suited his lessons to the inclination and taste of his pupil. He showed him books with illustrations, which were examined rather than read; he made mathematical models for him, and taught him ancient and modern history by means of his numismatic collection, which must have been commendably complete. When his pupil refused to sit still he walked up and down the room with him, and, like a peripatetic philosopher, entertained him with improving and useful conversation. Stehling himself admitted that the first six months of this course consisted more of a pre-

paration and mental training for learning than actual tuition, but later the course became more "serious." Peter was taught the use of the globes and mathematical geography, the history of neighbouring states was studied, "the current affairs of the nation" were examined, and he was instructed in the science of fortification and artillery. Stehling himself explains how instruction was derived from every occurrence, and how every event was turned to advantage. When they went shooting, books on sport with illustrations were produced. The ceilings of the palace yielded lessons of mythology, the toys of His Highness afforded opportunities for explaining the laws of mechanics, at a fire the fire-extinguishing appliances were inspected, and on their walks abroad the common objects were described. It all sounds very delightful and charming, but does not suggest disciplined application or hard mental work. The subject to which most attention was paid was dancing. The Empress was an enthusiastic dancer, and at her Court people vied with each other in attempts to excel in this graceful accomplishment. Whenever the dancing-master appeared all other occupation had to be discarded, until the Grand-Duke himself declared that he was convinced that there was a design to make a dancing-master of him, as dancing seemed to be the only thing which he was expected to do well. He was even taught ballet-dancing, and had to take part in the court masquerades.

At the end of his educational curriculum the Grand-Duke was little better than a fretful, ill-tempered, and ignorant child, a creature of whims and fancies, absolutely uncultured and undeveloped mentally. He was a great coward, for which reason he was constantly boasting of his prowess, and he preferred the society of servants, dreading the conversation of refined or educated people with whom he was not at his ease. He was cruel to human beings as well as to animals, which latter he loved to torture. He could spend hours playing with wooden soldiers, and delighted in the society of lackeys, of his dwarf Andrew, his body-servant Bastian, and similar persons.

In his habits he was disgusting. He had refused from the day he set his foot on Russian soil to conform with the national custom of taking a bath at least once a week, and he was consequently dirty in his person. He was constantly drunk, and

frequently went to bed with his boots on. Although he had been taught the tenets of the Greek Church he remained a Protestant at heart, and generally showed in all his leanings a lordly contempt for the country he was to be called upon to rule, and a strong regard for everything German, which was manifested in a number of petty and meticulous trifles and thus became ludicrous and contemptible.

In 1742 the Duke of Holstein embraced the Greek Orthodox faith and was proclaimed heir apparent to the Russian throne. Denmark, having already possessed herself of Schleswig, now intrigued for the acquisition of Holstein, which, being a German Duchy, could not possibly be ruled over by a Greek Catholic Prince.

Prince Adolphus, the Crown Prince of Sweden, and a brother of the Princess of Zerbst, was believed to be on the side of Denmark; he was the Regent of Holstein, and is suspected of having himself cast eyes of acquisitive longing on the Duchy. His stupid brother, Augustus, the acting Regent, took a more practical view of the situation. At the instigation of Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, he intrigued for the early proclamation of the coming of age of the Grand-Duke and his own appointment as his *locum tenens*, a policy entirely displeasing to Brümmer, who wanted the post for himself. Prince Augustus consequently came to St. Petersburg and speedily ingratiated himself with the Grand-Duke, for they had a strong bond of union in their hatred of Brümmer. He talked to him about Holstein, his constant love for which seems to have been the one redeeming feature in the otherwise despicable character of the Grand-Duke, and showed him how badly it was governed, and how necessary it was that the Grand-Duke should take the reins into his own hands.

Whilst the Princess of Zerbst and Prince Adolphus were intriguing with all their might against the stupid Augustus, as they called him, Lord Hyndford reports under date of the 18th June 1745: "Mr. Petzolt, the Saxon Resident, presented yesterday a diploma from his master, the Vicar of the Empire, granting the *venia ætatis* to the Great Duke. This puts entirely an end to Count Brümmer's administration of the affairs of the duchy of Holstein, and is likewise very disagreeable to the Princess of Zerbst."

At Kiel, people were taken completely by surprise, and had no time to concert measures before the arrival of Baron Korff, the Russian Ambassador at Copenhagen, who had the Grand-Duke officially proclaimed of age.

Korff's report on the doings of Mme Brockdorff and her relations to the Danish Court did not advance the cause of Brümmer, her acknowledged lover, but his account of the hopeless state of the finances of the Duchy raised the prestige of Prince Augustus, who had so boldly maintained that the country was being mismanaged, and so the diplomacy of Bestoujeff-Ryounin triumphed, Prince Augustus was appointed Stattholder, and the Princess Zerbst experienced another defeat.

The more Catherine saw of her future husband the less she liked him. Notwithstanding her youth and inexperience, the Grand-Duke's indifference to the most elementary conventions of decency and good behaviour was too obvious not to be detected by her. He was annoyed with her for taking the Greek religion seriously and following its observances. He played with his dolls and romped with his lackeys; his love of soldiering might have been explained by heredity, but his fondness for dolls and low company on the eve of his marriage could only argue an arrested mental development. This bridegroom of seventeen was not merely an infant, he was a bad-tempered, spoilt child. Not only did he naïvely imagine that everybody had the same opinions and views as he, he went further and considered it was the duty of others to be of the same mind as himself. At seventeen he was already a self-willed and conceited person, for whom his own will and desires were law, and who could brook no contradiction or restraint. For all that, he was crafty and deceitful and was as deficient in moral as he was void of physical courage. From the point of view of Catherine personally, the worst feature was the fact that she found herself powerless, notwithstanding all her efforts, to fix his affections, to inspire him with anything even faintly resembling romantic love, or at least to attach him to her by any means whatever. During the month of May, when the Winter Palace was abandoned for the Summer Palace, he informed his affianced bride that he was prevented from visiting her frequently because the distance was too great; in June and July whilst at Peterhof

he neglected her entirely for his military pursuits. All this deeply offended Catherine, who was a high-spirited Princess, and she found consolation only in tears.

Meanwhile the Grand-Duke had imported secretly a number of Holsteiners from his beloved Duchy and spent his days in drilling these poor fellows, and making their lives a burden to them. Another of his amusements was to play with a model of the town of Kiel which had been presented to him by a deputation of his loyal Holstein subjects, and which he declared he loved better than the whole empire of Russia. The Empress Elizabeth, on hearing this, packed the deputation back to their native land.

Thus the unhappy Duke of Holstein and heir apparent to the Russian throne was not the sort of person to kindle in the mind of a young and exceptionally intelligent and thoughtful German Princess sentiments of a romantic nature. The Grand-Duke Peter was a dirty, dissolute, drunken, ill-mannered, disingenuous, uneducated, opinionated, foolish, bad-tempered boy. His appearance, especially after the small-pox, was so revoltingly, repulsively ugly; that, as we have seen, the poor little girl who was about to be handed over to him, like a dog or a horse, without having her inclinations consulted or considered, without indeed any attempt being made to gloss over his faults or to paint him in attractive colours, was constantly bathed in tears at the thought of becoming the wife of the bosom of this little monster.

Much may no doubt be said in extenuation or excuse of his conduct. He had lost in his earliest infancy the tender and softening maternal care which exercises so benign and sublimating an influence on the character of a child, especially a boy. His father was too young and too frivolous to take seriously the double duties which had thus devolved upon him; moreover, the latter did not long survive his wife, and died just as his son had reached the most critical and impressionable age. We have seen what sort of training and education this boy with his high destiny enjoyed. Surrounded by no humanizing influence, denied the solace of human affection or religious faith, treated by his tutor, a licentious soldier, with fitful brutality and cruelty, the young Grand-Duke early acquired the arts of dissimulation;

deterred by no considerations other than those suggested by physical fear, he learnt at an early date the lessons which the oppressed and weak are too prone to learn, that it is easier to tell lies than to face consequences, that it is more convenient to get out of scrapes by craft than to be honest and truthful. The whole training of the princely victim of Brümmer's cruelty was calculated to make him mean and despicable, to undermine any vestige of nobility of character, idealism, or loftiness of mind that he may have ever possessed. Slander has attributed to his tutor a desire to undermine his constitution with the object of compassing his early death; there are even incredible stories of attempts at poisoning, of apples which came mysteriously into his possession and, when taken away from him, caused the death of the animals to which they were given. These stories are incredible because all motive for such attempts seems lacking. Of course, if Brümmer was indeed the father of little Peter, it is conceivable that his son's superior position and brilliant prospects may have irritated him and aroused his jealousy. It would not have been the first or last time that a father had been jealous of his son. But Brümmer seems, on the contrary, to have regarded Peter as a sort of vested interest, and to have looked upon the boy's aggrandizement as a means of his own advancement. Much more probable would it seem that Brümmer desired by his terrible severity to cow the boy's spirit, assuming him to have ever possessed any, and to have so imposed his personality on the weak and perhaps purposely untrained intellect of his charge, as to have given the tutor a permanent and dominant influence over him. Brümmer may even have had the deliberate intention of turning Peter into a helpless, half-witted idiot, entirely dependent upon him for every thought and act. Such cases are not unknown, even in private life,—there was one such but recently before the law courts of this country,—and there have been several well-established instances of similar fiendish designs in history. However this may be, Brümmer's plans, if indeed he had any, miscarried, and in his attitude towards Peter, notwithstanding his domineering brutality, he failed to acquire that ascendancy over him which, it may be assumed, he desired.

The fact therefore remains that the little Duke of Holstein

was possessed of a particularly perverse and headstrong nature, which no amount of disciplinary severity could break. He did not look up to Brümmer, his martinet tutor and reputed father ; he had no sentiments of affection, regard, or gratitude for the Empress Elizabeth, his benefactress, who had taken him away from the harsh and miserable surroundings of Kiel, adopted him as her heir, and placed him in a position in which he could no longer be thrashed and ill-used by Brümmer. Instead of being grateful, the little monster seems to have despised and ridiculed Elizabeth, and have never felt towards the Russian empire and nation, which he knew he would sooner or later be called upon to rule, any other feeling than that of contempt.

His behaviour towards Catherine was on a par with the rest of his conduct. In his half-witted cynicism he made her his confidante, and whilst never once paying her gallant addresses such as were customary at the time, he treated her as his play-fellow and companion, told her the tricks he had played, and the women he had been in love with. He seems to have been destitute of any single attractive or praiseworthy quality. He was as void of affection and feeling as he was ungainly in manners, repulsive in appearance, dirty in his habits, and deficient in intellect.

It was indeed no bed of roses which was being prepared as the bridal couch of the Grand-Duchess Catherine. We get no glimpse into her mind at this time, we only know that she was snubbed by her mother, who was scandalizing a not too censorious Court by her liaison with Betzkoy and her intrigues against Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, and that she spent a great deal of her time in reading, not the romances which were then in vogue, but serious French philosophical books, and this too after she had mastered the difficult Russian language (the grammar of which had been scarcely discovered), and had been initiated in the somewhat complicated and philosophical tenets of the Greek Orthodox faith.

The demure and circumspect, well-behaved child, for she was little more, had won golden opinions. The Empress, who was a most genial, expansive, good-natured, though very dissolute soul, had formed a warm affectionate regard for her. Her unselfishness had especially appealed to that intriguing and self-seeking yet kindly Court.

The only fault which had so far been found with Catherine was that she was extravagant, but when her extravagances came to be investigated it was found that not she, but others, had benefited. In short, she had not spent money on herself, but in presents to strangers.

It was not to be expected that this amiable and thoughtful Princess could centre her affections on such a booby as Peter. But she had her sense of duty, and, as we shall see, she honestly tried to live up to it. The Court of St. Petersburg, as we have described, was, however, hardly the best place for a young and neglected wife who had married against her inclination to live in. It was not amidst such surroundings that the principles of virtue and womanly purity and marital honour were likely to receive most encouragement, or to be stimulated and revived in moments of weakness or despondency, of weariness or even of temptation. The moral atmosphere was vitiated; there was, as far as one is able to gather at this distance of time, from letters, memoirs, and similar records, not a single person at that Court who could with any degree of accuracy be described as virtuous. The Empress gave the example, and the Grand-Duke seems to have been as vicious and perverted a little monster as he was tiresome and stupid. Even Catherine's own mother scandalized her daughter by succumbing to the contagion of the place, and "throwing her cap over the windmill," as the French have it. If Catherine held out a little longer and was not an easy victim, this was not for lack of temptation or opportunity.

CHAPTER V

MARRIAGE

THE Empress Elizabeth was now getting anxious to have the nuptials of her nephew and her kinswoman celebrated as speedily as possible. For this anxiety there were no doubt many reasons, both private and political. The delicate health of the Grand-Duke Peter made it very desirable to marry him as soon as possible in the hope of assuring the succession and perpetuating the dynasty. He had scarcely recovered from the small-pox when in the March of 1745 he was again taken ill. Lord Hyndford reports: "The Great-Duke has kept his bed for eight or ten days past, being very much indisposed by a fever and cold." Indeed, the Grand-Duke was so weak that the doctors recommended, on purely medical grounds, the postponement of the wedding for at least another year. But these medical arguments had an effect diametrically opposite to that which they were intended to produce; they only increased the desire of the Empress to hasten on the marriage. For among the political considerations which impelled her to this conclusion was the fact that although Duke Peter of Holstein had been publicly proclaimed heir apparent to the throne of Russia, the Brunswick family had not been forgotten, and the Emperor Ivan was known to be living. Symptoms of discontent and unrest had been recently manifesting themselves among the people, and suspicious persons were even successful in gaining access to the Court. On the 17th June 1745 Lord Hyndford reported to his Government: "There has been lately a wicked design against the life of the Empress by a person who was found hid behind a curtain in her dressing-room with a naked hanger under his coat. He was immediately seized and carried to the fortress, but they have not been able by the most exquisite torments to draw

one single word out of him as yet. There are eight more persons taken up, and the examinations are going on every day."

Lord Hyndford advances yet another reason. He says: "The Empress is determined to celebrate the marriage of the Great-Duke as soon as possible in order decently to get rid of the Princess of Zerbst and Count Brümmer."

The Princess of Zerbst was indeed a trial to everybody, and a thorn in her daughter's flesh. She even went so far as to accuse Catherine, on the authority of servants' tittle-tattle, of visiting the Grand-Duke's chamber at night, and brought her daughter to indignation and tears, whereupon Catherine was ordered out of the room. She actually endeavoured to entangle her daughter in her own intrigues, and got her brother, the Crown Prince of Sweden, to send Catherine ciphered dispatches: The Princess was in constant correspondence and negotiation with Brümmer, Mardefeldt, and Lestocq, all people who were in the bad books of the Empress. The arrival of Prince Augustus in the summer of 1745 still more discredited the Princess in the eyes of the Empress, and finally, two months before the marriage ceremony, Elizabeth ordered the correspondence of the Princess to be secretly examined, and any undesirable letters which might be addressed to her to be intercepted.

Elizabeth took a minute personal interest in the arrangements for the celebration. It seems that she was anxious to assure for Peter and Catherine all the solemnity and splendour of such a ceremony which she had herself been denied, in spite of the fact, reported by Lord Hyndford, that the revenues and finances of the country were in extreme disorder. "There is not a shilling in the publick coffers," he says, "although the expence and bad economy of the Court increaseth daily."

But such was the financial elasticity of the country, where the system of serfdom enabled the State and the nobles to raise money without difficulty, that these considerations did not weigh with the Government, nor was the slightest inconvenience experienced in carrying out the elaborate programme of the pageant-loving Empress, who now gave her whole mind to the details of the celebration. She manifested an impatience in listening to the reports of the Senate and the Chancellor unless they referred

to the marriage, and just before the actual day all government business was at a standstill; she even refused to sign the most important documents. In the ookaz issued by her, under date 16th March 1745, she says :

“ Hereby we proclaim: Whereas we, by the help and blessing of God, do most graciously intend to celebrate the marriage of their exalted Imperial Highnesses, our well-beloved nephew, the Grand-Duke of all the Russias, reigning Duke of Schleswig-Holstein, Peter Theodorovitch, and his affianced bride, the Grand-Duchess Catherine Alexeyevna, with all due and respectable solemnity, and with the Divine aid and sanction, purpose to inaugurate the same here in St. Petersburg in the first days of July of this year : Now we have been most graciously pleased to give due notice of the same to our Senate and to all the high functionaries and noble persons in this our Empire, and cause them to be advertised of this our intention in order that all those persons belonging to the first four Classes of nobility and rank and who may be present in St. Petersburg at the time, and all those gentlemen of the Court who may be entitled and deserving at the time, to attend the said celebration, shall be apprised so as to prepare, in proportion to their means and ability, rich apparel, chariots, trains, and other such equipages, and that each may accordingly employ as hereby permitted, where and how they may be able to do so, for the purposes of this solemn occasion as well for their clothes as for their said equipages, such gold and silver adornments as they may possess. And whereas these solemn celebrations and festivities shall be continued for several days, now therefore, each person, male or female, shall prepare for the same, at least one new suit of wearing apparel, however it shall be left to the discretion of each and several to cause to have prepared two or even more such suits of new wearing apparel, and equally also with reference to the above-mentioned equipages, one of these shall be fitted out for each person, whereby it is left to the discretion of each and several to fit out, as he may deem suitable, a separate such equipage for his wife. The servants and attendants on these said equipages shall moreover be retained in the proportions given in the instructions hereinafter following : Persons of the first and second classes shall have at each chariot two attendants,

and from eight to twelve footmen, as they may please ; provided always that there shall in no case be less than eight such footmen, with two runners, and moreover, if so desired, each person may besides have one or two pages for each chariot, as well as two chasseurs ; and Persons of the third class shall have at each chariot six footmen and two runners. Our Chamberlains and other such gentlemen of the Court of the same rank shall have six footmen and if desired two runners each ; Persons of the fourth class one gentleman-in-waiting, as well also as the Chamberlains and gentlemen-in-waiting of their Imperial Highnesses shall have four footmen each ; moreover, all other persons, equally whether belonging to the fifth or the sixth class, shall, during the period of festivity, albeit not for the ceremony, but nevertheless on such occasions where they shall attend at our Court, wear clothes and have equipages of good quality in accordance with the dignity and position of each and several."

It was easy enough to prescribe the number of footmen and runners by which each person should be attended, but for other and more important details the court officials were without precedent, and application was made to Paris, where the Dauphin's nuptials had but recently been celebrated, and to Dresden, where Augustus II had just solemnized the wedding of his son ; and presently the Russian Envoys at the French and Saxon Courts dispatched reams of particulars of court etiquette and ceremonial, accompanied by illustrations.

As soon as the ice on the Neva began to break up and thaw, vessels commenced arriving from Koenigsberg, Danzig, Stettin, and Lübeck, laden with carriages, fabrics, ready-made clothes and liveries, etc., all of which had been ordered abroad for the celebrations. There arrived besides some silk material which had been manufactured at Zerbst, presents from the Prince to his wife and daughter. At that time Zerbst was famous for its silk, and consequently there is reason to believe that the splendour of these fabrics was not exaggerated. Hyndford reports that the Empress was a great lover of English stuffs, particularly white and other light colours with large flowers of gold and silver.

In spite of the desire to hasten the marriage, the date had to be repeatedly postponed, an unlucky omen, because it was found

impossible to get ready in time. At first, in March, it was proposed to hold the ceremony at the beginning of July, in July the wedding was postponed to the first days of August, and finally the date fixed was Friday, the 21st. The festivities were to extend over ten days and terminate with a gala day of the Order of St. Alexander of the Neva.

During three days in the middle of August, special heralds in armour and escorted by detachments of horse guards and dragoons rode to different parts of St. Petersburg and, to an accompaniment of kettle-drums, announced to the people the approaching wedding of their Imperial Highnesses.

The populace gazed with the liveliest interest on the preparations which were being made, on the fountains in course of erection which were to flow with wine, the tables set up in the open streets for the banquets to the people. The Kazan Cathedral, which has played such a part in the modern history of Russia, had wooden platforms built round it, which were soon to be hung with red velvet and cloth.

On the 19th of August the Neva began to become alive with craft of every description, including galleys and yachts. On the 20th, from nine o'clock a.m. to eleven at night, the booming of guns and the chiming of church bells announced to the population the celebration of the following day.

Superstitious persons will not embark on an enterprise on a Friday, which is regarded as an unlucky day, and Friday, 21st August 1745, was certainly an unlucky day for Peter, and perhaps also for Catherine.

At five o'clock in the morning of that day the peaceful inhabitants of St. Petersburg were awakened from their slumbers by the fire of guns from the fortress. The Admiralty and the ships in the Neva gave the signal for the troops to assemble and line the streets from the palace and along the Nevsky Prospect to the Kazan Cathedral. At seven o'clock the Grand-Duchess Catherine made her appearance in the attiring-room of the Empress Elizabeth, who placed a small diamond diadem on the Grand-Duchess's head. The bride's hair was not powdered, she wore a dress of silver *glacé*, the skirt of which was half-way up richly embroidered in gold. She was described as looking bewitchingly beautiful. She had been given a faint touch of rouge,

and this gave colour and brightness to her complexion. Her mother says that her lustrous black hair seemed to emphasize the youthfulness of her appearance, and imparted to the brilliancy of the brunette something of the delicate refinement of the blonde.

At ten o'clock in the morning, to the accompaniment of trumpets and kettle-drums, the procession started on its way to the Cathedral. The long line of 120 court equipages, with their footmen, runners, blackamoors, pages, and chasseurs, was broken up at intervals by the mounted escorts of cuirassiers, horse guards, dragoons, and hussars. The chariot of the Empress with the bride and bridegroom was drawn by eight horses, led by grooms, and was preceded by the Grand Master of the Ceremonies and the Lord High Chamberlain, each in an open carriage with his mace of office, and attended by a great number of mounted court office-bearers.

The British Envoy in his official report of the ceremony said: "The procession was the most magnificent that ever was known in this country, and infinitely surpassed anything I ever saw."

It was so long that, in spite of the comparatively short distance from the Winter Palace to the Kazan Cathedral, the Empress did not arrive there before one o'clock. The religious ceremony was performed with all the gorgeousness of the Greek Orthodox ritual. The bridal crowns, in accordance with the beautiful symbolic marriage service, were supported by Prince Augustus of Holstein and Count Alexis Rasoumovsky, the Lord Grand Master of the Imperial Hunt, the former holding the crown of Peter and the other that of Catherine, over their respective heads.

The religious ceremony lasted until four p.m., and the procession then returned to the Winter Palace in the order in which it had left it.

There was a gala banquet at the palace, followed by a state ball, at which dancing was kept up until one in the morning.

On the morning of the next day, Saturday, the 22nd of August, the Grand-Duke presented his bride with a complete suite of sapphires and diamonds, and the Empress presented her with a suite of emeralds, besides a full trousseau consisting of linen, lace, and dresses.

In accordance with the prescribed programme the festivities

were continued for ten days, balls alternating with masquerades, Italian opera, French comedies, to say nothing of banquets and suppers, receptions, state progresses, illuminations, and fireworks.

The final ceremony consisted in parading on the Neva the famous boat of Peter the Great, "the grandfather of the Russian Fleet." By an *ookaz* of the 2nd of September 1724 Peter I had decreed that on the 30th of August of each year this boat should be solemnly paraded on the Neva and taken to the Alexander Nevski Monastery. But Peter the Great died very shortly after issuing this edict (*ookaz* is a literal translation of this word) and the decree was forgotten, but twenty years later it was discovered and given effect to by the Empress Elizabeth, who paraded the boat for the first time in 1744. In 1745 it was paraded for the second and last time, the custom being abandoned after that date.

The ceremony is minutely described in the official records.

The old boat was placed on a barge which was covered with red cloth, and this was towed by row-boats from the fortress of SS. Peter and Paul. The boat was preceded by two twelve-oared barges, with sailors and officers in full uniform, and two trumpeters on board of each. It was followed by the man-o'-war *St. Barbara*, 60 guns, the Empress's yacht, and all the available craft in the river, with bands playing. On arrival at the monastery the guns fired a salute, the signal for divine service was hoisted, and the priests, monks, and choir conducted a fully choral liturgy. The boat was then blessed with holy water. On the return journey the boat was cheered, salutes were fired, and the standard unfurled, for the Empress and the newly married couple were on board. The Empress kissed the image of her father which was in the boat. She then escorted the boat, in her own barge, back to the fortress and handed it into the custody of the Commandant.

On the return to the palace there was a ball, followed by fireworks and ending with a supper. Thus terminated the ten days, the gayest probably, according to a flattering contemporary chronicler, the Princess of Zerbst; that had ever been known in Europe.

During this period Catherine wrote not a line to any one, nor is this surprising, in view of the fatigues and dissipations of that festive time. Her mother informed the Prince of Zerbst: "The

Grand-Duchess desires to testify her respects to you; but has herself no time to write. For her there is such novelty in being allowed to be alone with her husband, that the two will not part from each other even for a quarter of an hour." This idyllic picture of connubial felicity is scarcely confirmed in the *Memoirs* of Catherine; in which we read: "My dear husband did not pay me the slightest attention. . . . I was left to myself to yawn and mope; and had no one with whom to exchange a word"; but then the authenticity of these *Memoirs* is not above suspicion.

After the marriage of Catherine on the 21st August 1745 the occupation of her mother was gone. Princess Johanna Elizabeth of Zerbst had no further business in Russia. Her horses were ordered for her, and all the necessary arrangements for her return journey were made. She left St. Petersburg on the 28th September at three p.m. On her departure both she and her suite were loaded with presents. Count Bestoujeff-Ryousmin; in a letter to Count Vorontzoff, says she was given Rs.50,000, or about £5000 in money, and two trunks full of Chinese stuffs, etc.; and that the members of her suite received costly presents in proportion. Latorff had Rs.5000 and a sable fur coat, and Fräulein Klein Rs.4000 and a train set with diamonds. The two chamberlains had Rs.2000 each, the groom of the chambers Rs.500, and each of the footmen Rs.200. The Grand-Duke Peter sent His Highness the Prince of Anhalt-Zerbst his diamond buttons, a sword set in diamonds, a pair of diamond buckles, and several similar gifts.

Lord Hyndford in reporting the departure of the Princess, says that "When she took leave she fell at the Empress's feet and with a flood of tears asked pardon if she had done anything to offend Her Majesty. The Empress answered that it was now too late to think of that, and told her, that if she had been all along so humble it would have been better for her."

The Princess herself, writing to her husband, gives a rather different account of the leave-taking, which was, she says, very affecting: "It was particularly difficult for me to say good-bye to Her Imperial Majesty, and that great Monarch was on her part so gracious as to be most profoundly moved, so much so that the entire attendant Court was equally in the greatest agitation,

We took leave of each other an interminable number of times, and this most beneficent of Sovereigns accompanied me with tears to the stairs, giving expression to the tenderest and most gracious sentiments."

On her arrival at Riga the Princess received the following letter from the Empress :

"MADAM, MY NIECE. I have judged it necessary to recommend you to suggest to the Prussian King, on your arrival in Berlin, it would be most agreeable to me if he would recall his minister plenipotentiary, Baron Mardefeldt, and send in his place somebody else besides Mr. Fockerodt, being persuaded, from the ability of your Serene Highness, that you will do your best endeavours to present this matter to His Majesty in the best possible manner, and that you will let it be understood that my request has no other object than the unbroken maintenance of my friendship and perfect concord with him.

For the rest, I wish you, Madam, a happy journey, and am your most devoted affectionate friend

ELIZABETH

8 October 1745 "

It would have been difficult, says Bilbassoff gleefully, to have dealt the Princess a heavier blow ; for on her departure from Russia she had promised Baron Mardefeldt to do her utmost to promote his interests, and in her letters from Moscow and St. Petersburg she informed the King of Prussia of the success of her efforts, and now she would be compelled to confess in Berlin to Frederick II personally that Baron Mardefeldt did not enjoy the confidence of the Empress and that he must be recalled. She had undertaken to incline Russia to the side of Prussia, and now she had to make a statement which indicated that instead of an increase of friendship there was danger of a serious coolness between the two countries.

A dispatch of Lord Hyndford of the 28th September 1745 throws some light on the situation. He reports from Russia : " This Court has lately been informed that the King of Prussia has sent a writing to the successor (Heir Apparent) of Sweden, setting forth the incompatibility of the Great-Duke of Russia possessing the Dutchy of Holstein, or of his having a vote in the

(German) Empire, as he is of the Greek religion. The King of Prussia adviseth the successor of Sweden to insist on his right to that Dutchy, and gives him the strongest assurances that he will assist the successor with his whole force to put him in possession not only of that Dutchy, but likewise the Dutchy of Sleswick."

Now the heir apparent to the throne of Sweden, who had been nominated to that position through the influence of the Empress Elizabeth, was the brother of the Princess of Zerbst.

Moreover; three days after her departure; Baron Mardefeldt called unexpectedly on the Chancellor, Count Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, to inform him of the victory his sovereign, the King, had just won over the army of an ally of Russia's. The very next day a meeting of the Council was held under the presidency of the Empress herself, at which it was resolved to send speedy succour to His Majesty the King of Poland, Russia's ally, against the violent and peace-disturbing action of the Prussian King.

When the Princess arrived in Berlin Frederick II was away on his second Silesian campaign which he was shortly to bring to so brilliant a conclusion. She delivered her message to Podewills; who immediately informed the King; the latter replied that he was utterly astounded, but, in a letter to the Princess, bade her assure the Empress that he would give effect to her wishes.

In all this miserable business the short-sightedness of the Princess appears, to Russian critics more especially, as extraordinary and deplorable. While her daughter, Catherine, had the sense from the first to strike the right note, to learn the Russian language, and to identify herself with the country of her adoption, the Princess of Zerbst never seemed to understand that she was the mother of a future Russian Empress, but was content to remain, and play the part of, the wife of a Prussian General, and of a semi-political agent of a King who was as little scrupulous as he was wanting in generosity.

Her efforts on that King's behalf were ludicrously abortive. The Marquis de la Chetardie, the arch-intriguer, was expelled, Mardefeldt had to be recalled, and the enemy, Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, instead of being disgraced, was promoted from Vice-Chancellor to Chancellor.

At first the Empress Elizabeth was disposed to show favour

to all the members of the Zerbst family, but she very speedily altered her attitude. Contrary to expectation the Prince was not invited to the wedding of his daughter, and after having asked his wife to endeavour to obtain for him the Duchy of Courland he was deeply disappointed to find that the disgraced and exiled Biren, and not he, was eventually elected.

Indeed it would appear that from the very first the Princess of Zerbst committed the grave mistake of despising her principal political adversary and of treating him with a sort of lofty contempt as a Russian barbarian and a negligible quantity. She threw in her lot with the various foreigners at the Russian Court, and did not understand that the great political merit of the Empress Elizabeth was to think imperially as the ruler of a great nation and not as a partisan of one or the other groups of European States, whose petty intrigues affected her own country but little. In Bestoujeff-Ryoumin she recognized a wise and patriotic statesman, and until she suspected him of intriguing against herself she turned a deaf ear to his foreign enemies, indeed their enmity only served to strengthen his position.

Her mother departed, Catherine felt more lonely and miserable than ever. Even while her mother was with her she lived in an atmosphere of intrigue, for her mother was under constant observation and was closely watched. Castera records how on one occasion, when the Princess of Zerbst wished to send a letter to the King of Sweden, she had to have recourse to the following stratagem. At a court ball at which the Princess and her daughter, the Grand-Duchess, were present, the Grand-Duchess approached the veteran Lestocq, who, according to his amiable custom, was flirting with the ladies, and throwing him her glove said she desired to dance with him. Lestocq on picking up the glove perceived it contained a letter. With a smile the practised courtier exclaimed: "I accept your challenge, Madame, but instead of returning you your glove I will beg you to give me the other also, in order that I may present them both to my wife, as a gift from you; that will put the finishing touch on your favour." After the ceremonious steps of the dance had been completed, Lestocq hid the gloves in his waistcoat and disappeared, fearful lest he be searched.

Thus we see that Catherine received an early training and was

initiated by her own mother in the shifts and subterfuges and clandestine devices of court intrigue.

Shortly after her marriage Catherine was present, on the 25th November, at the celebration of the anniversary of the accession to the throne of the Empress Elizabeth. In the evening there was a supper in honour of the principal actors in that great drama. The large hall of the Winter Palace was the scene of this feast; here a table was laid for the 330 sergeants and privates who had helped her to the crown of Russia. The Empress, in male attire and in the uniform of captain, booted and spurred and with plumes in her hat, sat down to meat with her "comrades"; in an adjoining room the grand-ducal party, with the diplomatic circle, the high functionaries of the Court, and other distinguished guests, were accommodated. It is believed that this ceremony, so simple and yet so significant, made a deep impression on the young but thoughtful Grand-Duchess.

While the Empress Elizabeth, who was as fond of junketings and feastings as her father, was enjoying herself at balls and masquerades, for which the Grand-Duke's marriage offered a welcome excuse, and even organized a carnival, as Bestoujeff-Ryoumin wrote to Vorontzoff, Catherine moped.

"To-day," says Bestoujeff, "we are holding carnival and masquerading entertainments such as were common in the life of His Imperial Majesty of blessed and eternally deserving memory, the Emperor Peter the Great. They began in this manner: they were held in the houses of the nobility of the first and second class on the respective days assigned to them, and there our most gracious sovereign and autocrat, attended by all her imperial family and suite, is always pleased to be, and to these all the generals and nobility are all invited, so that there are from three to four hundred masques present."

These brilliant functions failed to dissipate Catherine's melancholy. Six months after the marriage the French Envoy wrote :

"It is asserted that the Grand-Duke has not yet given proof of his manhood to the Grand-Duchess. If this had occurred but once it seems probable that persons who like to make sure of things, and to whom they are of importance, putting all

delicacy on one side, would take sure and certain means of providing an heir for Russia."

Castera, writing somewhat ambiguously, stated that "the Grand-Duke had an imperfection, which, although easy to remove, was none the less cruel. The violence of his passion and his reiterated efforts had failed to enable him to succeed in consummating his marriage. If this Prince had confided his case to anybody of some experience the obstacle to his desires could have been easily overcome. The most obscure rabbi of St. Petersburg or the humblest surgeon could have effected his deliverance. But such was the confusion with which this misfortune covered him, that he had not even the courage to disclose it; and the Princess, who no longer received his caresses except with repugnance, and who was at the time no more experienced than he, did not think of consoling him or of making him take measures which would restore him to her arms."

At one of the masquerades to which reference has been made the husband of this loveless marriage caught cold. Lord Hyndford reported: "The Great-Duke has had a violent fever and recovers so slowly that it is to be feared his life is still in danger, for the distemper seems to have fallen on his lungs."

In the *Memoirs* published by Herzen this circumstance is described in detail. The Grand-Duke caught a chill at the last masquerade of the series given by the Chief of Police, General Tatistcheff, at the Smolny Palace. This wooden structure had been partly destroyed by fire, and only two wings had been preserved. While dancing proceeded in the one wing, supper was served in the other, and the guests had to pass in the cold open air from the ball-room to the supper-room; and after supper they had to return to the ball-room in the same manner. This was in January, when the weather is particularly severe in St. Petersburg. On the following morning the Grand-Duke woke up with a very bad headache, and Catherine sent for a doctor. Peter was bled several times and placed in Catherine's own bed. The Empress came to see him frequently and was evidently touched to find the Grand-Duchess in tears. One day she sent her favourite, Mme Izmailoff, to tell Catherine that she should trust in God, not fret herself about her husband's illness, and that the Empress would never forsake her. The *Memoirs*

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CHAPTER VI

IN DISGRACE

THE conduct of the Grand-Duke Peter had in the past excited universal condemnation. Even his tutor Stehling was disgusted with him. His manners were the reverse of agreeable, and in this particular he was no respecter of persons, for he took little pains to make himself pleasant to people whose favour it might have been prudent to enlist. He was intemperate and addicted to drink, and being of a weak and delicate constitution he could not carry his liquor, but used to get helplessly drunk. His favourite associates, according to the French Envoy, were either young men who had been brought up in the worst possible manner or else people who were content to play the buffoon. The Empress Elizabeth was well aware of all this; she knew of his overbearing insolence to others, his contempt for Russia and everything Russian, his infantile amusements and his scandalous conduct, and she had overlooked them all; but when it came to his actually exposing her own relaxations to ridicule, and making a peep-show of her private amorous convivial evenings, which were even concealed from servants, she became indignant. Measures were now taken against this foolish, half-witted heir apparent to the throne, but not only against him, his unoffending consort had equally to suffer the effects of the righteous rage of her Imperial patroness.

Peter had played the part of Peeping-Tom in the middle of April 1746, and on the 10th of May of the same year Count Bestoujeff-Ryoumin had already submitted the "Instructions" for the "distinguished lady" to be appointed to the person of the Grand-Duchess which he had framed by command of the Empress.

It may be as well at this juncture once more to draw atten-

tion to the fact, that Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, the most powerful Russian statesman of his time, had been treated with but scant courtesy by the Princess of Zerbst, who regarded him as her enemy, but considered her own influence and her own friends at Court as so strong and so vastly superior that she could afford to ignore the somewhat uncouth Russian statesman, whose ability she undervalued, nor did she discover until too late the extent to which he enjoyed the confidence of the careless and pleasure-loving Empress, who, while preferring the society of more elegant and polished courtiers, absolutely trusted him in the serious business of the State.

Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, having triumphed over the mother, may be supposed to have suspected the daughter of being but indifferently affected towards him. The disgrace of Peter was therefore obviously an opportunity for clipping the wings of Catherine as well. To his mind they were both enemies of Russia, hostile to the policy which he was pursuing, and partizans of that dangerous King of Prussia who had caused so much grave anxiety to his neighbours, and whose restless ambition and intriguing spirit might be a source of injury to Russia.

The selection of a sort of duenna to keep a watch on Catherine, Bestoujeff-Ryoumin prudently and tactfully left to the Empress, but he recommended five essential rules by which the conduct of this duenna was to be governed, namely :

1. She should possess a real zeal for the Orthodox Greek religion, not merely as regards the observance of external forms and rites, but a genuine heartfelt interior and active religious feeling.

2. She must exercise a vigilant solicitude for the marital fidelity of Their Imperial Highnesses. The delicate question of the importance of assuring the succession to the throne was tactfully and considerately dealt with in the following manner. The distinguished lady was to explain to the Grand-Duchess that "she had been raised to her present high place in the favour of Her Imperial Majesty for no other reason than that the empire might receive a desired heir and Her Majesty's Imperial House a scion."

3. She must keep the Grand-Duchess under constant supervision ; watch her every step and follow her wherever she may go.

She was to prevent familiarities between the Grand-Duchess and the courtiers and pages which might give rise to suspicion as well as any impudent attempts of anybody whosoever to whisper in the ear of the Grand-Duchess, hand her letters or books surreptitiously, or take any other similar liberties.

4. She was to restrain the Grand-Duchess from all interference in the affairs of the State as well as in the affairs of Holstein, and also from superfluous secret correspondence ; seeing that the Grand-Duchess could always have her letters composed in the Department (College) of Foreign Affairs, from whence they could be brought to her for signature.

5. " She should have always free access to us for the oral communication of her wants."

As a companion to these instructions for Catherine, the crafty statesman submitted a day later instructions for the conduct of the Grand Duke. These are too minute and detailed to quote at length, but they fully confirm the complaints which are found scattered all over Catherine's *Memoirs*. They were composed with a view to the various " youthful errors perpetrated," and they exhibit Peter as treating with derision and contempt the dogmas and ritual of the Orthodox Greek Church. During divine service he gave evidence of indifference and neglectful carelessness, to the obvious indignation of the assembled congregation, and he even behaved disrespectfully to the clergy. In his own room he passed his time " playing with his servants or soldiers or with toys," he indulged " in every kind of pernicious familiarity with the domestic and other vile servants," he joked " with lacqueys and similar base people," attired them in military uniforms, gave them guns, organized an entire regiment in his rooms, and transformed " the art of war into a jest." Moreover, Peter is accused of behaving indecorously at table, of ridiculing the servants, throwing wine over them, and even of indulging in unseemly jests. In conversation with strangers he made use of derogatory expressions and gestures. Nevertheless, the Grand-Duke is described as having attained by the grace of God years of discretion, and as being therefore fully qualified to govern by himself his Holstein territories, and consequently to be freed from the tutelage of his former supervisors.

Thus the Grand-Duke, who did not know how to behave at

table, was given full power to govern his duchy and allowed, should he manifest any such inclination, to devote himself to serious business. But it was otherwise with the Grand-Duchess; she was limited in absolutely everything in which she could possibly usefully employ her time. What she more particularly felt was the deprivation of the right of exchanging letters with her parents. To prevent suspicion of "superfluous and secret correspondence" Catherine was prohibited from writing any letters at all. She was only permitted to affix her signature to official communications which were prepared for her in the "College of Foreign Affairs," and were practically limited to the stereotyped phrase, "This comes hoping you are well as it leaves me at present."

The subterfuges to which this order of things gave rise are described very romantically in the *Memoirs*, where the arrival of Sacromozo, the Maltese knight, is recorded. He was presented to Catherine, and whilst kissing her hand, according to the etiquette of the Russian Court, which still obtains, managed to convey to her fingers a small paper tube, murmuring *sotto voce*, "This is from your mother." Catherine nearly fainted with fright, but successfully concealed the paper in her glove. Returned to her room she discovered that the paper contained a letter from her mother, grown anxious at her daughter's enforced silence, and solicitous of news. It bore a request to return the answer to an Italian musician who was to take part in a concert to be given to the Grand-Duke, who was very fond of music and even scraped the fiddle, though he could not play it himself. Catherine replied to her mother and told her all she wanted to know, and how a Mr. Olsoufieff had been disgraced for receiving a few lines which she had begged him to enclose in a letter to her mother. Having rolled this missive into a tube she awaited the first concert. At this a certain violin soloist, the musician who had been indicated to her, took an opportunity to pull a large handkerchief out of his pocket and to expose the open pocket to the view of Catherine, who carelessly dropped the paper into it. In this manner Catherine was able to exchange letters with her mother for some time, without being discovered, but this was scarcely a good training for a young and inexperienced Princess, especially in view of all the exceptional circumstances of her matrimonial relations.

The most important point in the instructions of Bestoujeff-Ryoumin was of course the one which referred to the marital fidelity of the grand-ducal pair. This point was very fully elaborated. Bestoujeff-Ryoumin wrote :

“ And whereas Her Imperial Highness has been chosen to be the worthy wife of our most dearly beloved nephew, His Imperial Highness the Grand-Duke and Heir to the Empire, and whereas the same has been exalted for no other hope or intention, than that Her Imperial Highness, by her intelligence, wisdom, and virtues, might inspire His Imperial Highness with true and genuine affection, and draw his heart towards her, and thus obtain for us an heir and successor, so much desired by the empire, and a scion of our house ; which however cannot be looked for without a foundation of mutual genuine affection and marital candour, and more particularly without an absolute disposition to please on her part ; now therefore we have the most gracious expectations of Her Imperial Highness, and hope that she, recognizing that her own happiness and prosperity are dependent thereon, will ripely respect this important aspect and, with a view to attaining this object, will never cease on her part to employ more and more her best efforts to please, and all possible means for this purpose. For we most firmly desire to represent this wish, so momentous for ourselves and for the entire country, to Her Imperial Highness on all occasions in the most zealous manner, and unceasingly to spur Her Imperial Highness always to conduct herself with His Imperial Highness her husband in the most suitable loving manner, and to endeavour to attract his affections to her by pleasing him, submitting to him, and showing him every affection, amiability, and passionate devotion, and that she should generally adopt all possible methods for drawing the heart of His Imperial Highness entirely to her, no matter in what manner, and always to live with him in every way in perfect good understanding and harmony ; to avoid all occasions which might give rise to any degree of coldness or offence, and thus to endeavour to secure for herself and her husband the greatest possible sweetness and happiness of life, and for us the realization of our benevolent maternal desires, whilst fulfilling the loyal hopes of all our faithful subjects. And with this object you are to use your most zealous efforts for the maintenance of the most precious good

understanding and harmony, the sincere affection and the marital fidelity of both Imperial Highnesses, by watching over them to the best of your ability. The slightest coldness or misunderstanding should be anticipated and prevented by your pleasant counsel and affability, and in the event of failure you should immediately and faithfully report all the circumstances to us. And in this connection Her Imperial Highness the Grand-Duchess should have represented to her, and the same should have her recognition and respect, that her husband is not only her lord and master, but is in time to be her Emperor, when she will be entirely in subjection to him, just as they two are now the first subjects in the Russian Empire, and that therefore Her Imperial Highness, in the interests of her own present and future happiness, should, in justice, act in all things according to the will of her husband, and in order to retain his ardent affections and his permanent cordiality she had better, in matters which might have to her an appearance of arbitrariness or even injustice, restrain her own feelings, rather than by contradiction or obstinacy give rise to most pernicious discord and coldness betwixt each other, and the most poignant grief and distress to ourselves."

Catherine had been married for nearly nine months when these instructions were composed, and comment is needless, for, as we have seen, according to all accounts, the marriage had not been consummated. In the eyes of the world Catherine had failed in her duty, she had not justified her existence.

A cousin of the Empress, married to a Chamberlain of the Court called Tchoglokoff, was selected for the post of duenna. She was nineteen when the Empress ascended the throne and conferred on her the title of Countess. She married in the August of 1742 and the couple were given apartments in the Imperial Palace. There was no more favoured lady in the entourage of the Empress than Mme Tchoglokoff; she was devoted to her husband, by whom she had several children, and she was in her twenty-fourth year when Bestoujeff-Ryoumin recommended her for the post of Mistress of the Robes to the Grand-Duchess, as he states in a letter to Count Vorontzoff, adding that all the other members of her household were instructed to approach the Grand-Duchess through the sole intermediary of the Countess. Catherine describes her as stupid, malevolent, and grasping. She appears

to have been somewhat of a creature of whims and fancies, but otherwise no worse, nor more stupid or grasping, than others, but her husband and she were the instruments of Bestoujeff, and as such they were bound to be inconvenient to Catherine.

In a dispatch of the 28th April 1747 the French Envoy writes : " The Grand-Duke betrays in his conversation the greatest sensitiveness to the yoke imposed, which grows more burdensome every day, and no person whatever, without exception, no matter who it may be, can talk to him or the Grand-Duchess either in public or in private, except in the presence of M. and Mme Tchogloloff, people entirely devoted to the Chancellor."

Naturally the appointment of these persons had a most depressing effect upon Catherine, who wept very much at the lady's arrival, and had to be bled on the following day. In the morning the Empress came to see her, and, observing that her eyes were red from weeping, told her that young women who did not love their husbands always wept, that her mother had stated that Catherine had no disinclination to marry Peter, that the Empress had in no way forced her to marry, and now that she had married she must make the best of it, and there was nothing to cry about.

Next day, after dinner, the Grand-Duke took his wife aside and gave her to understand that he believed Mme Tchogloloff's appointment was due to the fact that Catherine did not love him.

In the *Memoirs* the case is put very plainly : " Had the Grand-Duke desired affection, then, as far as I was concerned, this would not have been difficult, for I was by nature inclined and accustomed to do my duty."

On the other hand, if Peter was wanting in affection towards his wife he does not appear to have had any mistresses at that time, and he certainly had had no illegitimate children. His mind seemed to be entirely occupied with his dolls and puppets and the questionable company of unedifying buffoons and servants, with whom he was on terms of strange and undignified familiarity.

He was constantly falling into a sort of calf-love with various ladies of the Court, to all of whom he seems to have made himself more or less ridiculous.

One of the first effects of the disfavour of the grand-ducal pair was a blow which they were able to sustain with equanimity.

On the 12th of April 1746 Lord Hyndford reported: "Count Brümmer's fall approacheth. The Great-Duke has advised him to ask his dismissal, which if he does not do, he will be sent away ignominiously." And writing under date of the 24th of May 1746 Lord Hyndford says: "On the twenty-first inst. Count Brümmer received his dismissal from the hands of Prince August, administrator of Holstein, and the rest of that counsel assembled for that purpose, as likewise did M. Birkholtz, great-chamberlain to the Great-Duke and under-strapper of Brümmer."

When the husband of Mme Tchogloloff returned from a mission to Vienna, Lord Hyndford reported other "dismissals." He writes: "M-r Bredal, a Holsteiner, son to Admiral Bredal in this service, who is master of the horse and grand veneur to the Great Duke, is to leave this place as soon as the season is open. One Duker, a chamberlain of the Great-Duke and Great-Dutchess, a Livonian by birth, is likewise dismiss, as well as the Great-Duke's favourite *maitre d'hôtel*, Cremen, and his first huntsman, who married a favourite *fille de chambre* of the Great-Dutchess. A merchant from Curland, Schriver, was obliged to leave all his business and debts at Court in twice twenty-four hours." Tchogloloff also dismissed two chamberlains for apparently no other reason than that the Grand-Duke favoured them. Soon afterwards "four other persons were discharged, three of them pages whom the Grand-Duke was particularly fond of."

Later, Lord Hyndford records that "Prince Augustus of Holstein, brother to the Princess of Zerbst, has been entering into his sister's Prussian intrigues, and it is already notified to him that there is a small man-of-war ready to carry him to Holstein, as the air of this country does not seem to agree with his constitution."

Mardefeldt, whose recall, we have seen, the Princess of Zerbst had been requested to urge, had of course also to go, although he boasted to Lord Hyndford that "if he could have protracted his rapel till the return of the Vice-Chancellor he might have been able to displace the Chancellor himself," a piece of vain bravado.

Baron Axel von Mardefeldt had represented Prussia at the Russian Court for twenty years. He first came to Russia in 1724, had known Peter the Great personally, and seen all the

rulers and favourites of the intermediate period. He was regarded as *persona gratissima*, and had a position and influence such as were enjoyed by no other diplomatic representative in St. Petersburg, yet even he was unable to hold out against the astute Bestoujeff. Even Lestocq was put in prison.

The position of Catherine was unenviable in the extreme, for she was also under suspicion. From all that has been said the reader will have gathered that the moral atmosphere of the Russian Court during the eighteenth century was not particularly pure. Indeed, the amorous dalliances of the courtiers of the Empress Elizabeth, even those of the most criminal nature, were regarded as harmless frolics. The standard of morality was such that purity of life and respectable domesticity were disbelieved in and attributed to no one. Illicit amours, intrigues and liaisons, to say nothing of actual criminal misdemeanours, were the order of the day and excited interest rather than condemnation or disgust. It was therefore only natural that Catherine herself should be made the subject of suspicion and scandal-mongering gossip.

In the *Memoirs* these first pale shadows, which the events that were to follow were casting before them, are thus recorded :

"When I first arrived in Moscow the Grand-Duke had three servants in his apartments, Tchernitcheff by name, all three sons of grenadiers of the body-guard of the Empress. These all held the rank of lieutenant as a reward for having helped the Empress to the throne. The eldest was a cousin of the two younger brothers Tchernitcheff, and the Grand-Duke was very fond of all three. They were on a most confidential footing with him and ready to do him any service. The three were all tall and well-made, especially the eldest. The Grand-Duke used to employ this young man on all his errands, and daily sent him several times to me. Him he also took into his confidence whenever he felt indisposed to come and pour out his heart to me. Tchernitcheff was a very intimate friend of my groom of the chambers, Effreinoff, and through him I learned to know a good deal of which I might otherwise have remained ignorant. Moreover, the two were sincerely devoted to me ; so that I was able to obtain explanations from them which I could not procure by other means without difficulty. I do not know in what connection the older Tcherni-

tcheff once said to the Grand-Duke : ' I your bridegroom ! She is not my bride but yours ! ' The Grand-Duke was much amused at this and told me the incident, and after that it pleased His Imperial Highness to call me ' his bride,' and Andrew Tchernitcheff whenever he spoke of him to me, ' your bridegroom.' To put an end to this pleasantry Andrew Tchernitcheff proposed to His Imperial Highness to call me after our marriage, his ' little mother,' and I called him my ' little son.' From this time forward the Grand-Duke and I constantly referred to this ' little son,' whom he cherished as the apple of his eye and to whom I was also very favourably disposed.

" In due course, however, my servants grew suspicious ; some from jealousy, others for fear of the consequences which might accrue to them. One day, on the occasion of a *bal masqué* at Court, I returned to my room to change my dress. Suddenly my servant Effreinoff approached me and whispered that he as well as all my dependants were very much afraid of the danger into which they saw I must sooner or later plunge. And when I asked him what danger he referred to, he replied, ' You talk and occupy yourself with no one but Andrew Tchernitcheff.' ' Well,' I replied, in the innocence of my heart, ' and what harm is there in that ? He is my son. The Grand-Duke is as fond of him as I am, and he is loyal and devoted to us.' ' That is true,' he replied, ' the Grand-Duke can do as he pleases, but you have not the same privilege. What you call kindness and goodwill, because this man serves you well, your people call love.' As soon as he had uttered this word, which had never entered my mind, I felt as though I had been struck by lightning ; the presumption of my servants and the grave situation in which, without suspecting it, I found myself, gave me a shock. Effreinoff told me further that he had advised his friend Andrew Tchernitcheff to feign sickness in order to put a stop to this tittle-tattling. The latter followed Effreinoff's counsel and his supposed illness continued into April. The Grand-Duke was very much concerned about this, and frequently talked to me of it without having the least idea of what had occurred. It was not until we moved into the Summer Palace that Tchernitcheff again appeared, and I was unable to look at him without a certain feeling of confusion."

The Grand-Duke was fond of giving concerts in the afternoon, at which he used to play the violin in an agonizing manner, for he had no knowledge of music and simply scraped his bow across the strings without skill or method, producing sounds calculated to bring tears to the eyes of a cat. On these occasions Catherine, who moreover had no ear for music, used to get so fearfully bored that she would retire into her own room, which communicated directly with the large hall of the Summer Palace. Here one day, being quite alone and having nothing to do, she opened the door and perceived Andrew Tchernitcheff at the opposite end of the hall. She beckoned him to approach, whereupon he came up, and in reply to a trivial question told her he could not hear what she was saying as the workmen who were painting the ceiling of the hall were making too much noise, and begged to be allowed to enter her room. This she refused, and so they stood one at each side of the half-opened door, when Catherine, impelled by a sudden impulse, turned back her head and observed Count Devierre, a chamberlain of the Court, entering her toilette-room by the opposite door behind her. He had been sent by the Grand-Duke to fetch her. She closed the door and returned to the concert-room, but ascertained later that Count Devierre as well as a number of other courtiers had orders to spy on her movements. On the following day the Grand-Duke and she learned that the three Tchernitcheffs had been appointed lieutenants to regiments stationed at Orenburg, and had been ordered to join them. Mme Tchogloloff commenced her duties as duenna a day later.

Bilbassoff corrects this statement by showing that in the *Memoirs* themselves it is contradicted: the Tchernitcheffs, who were removed from the Court on the 23rd May 1746, were kept under arrest for about two years, and not sent to join their regiments until 1748. Whilst they were under arrest a strict inquiry was held, at which Bilbassoff surmises that torture was probably used.¹

¹ The usual method of torture employed in Russia at that time is very graphically described by Captain Perry in his interesting account of *The State of Russia* (1716). In common with most foreigners he calls the instrument of torture, the pleyt, the knout, which latter word is the Russian generic name for any kind of whip, whether used for horses or dogs or other purposes. Perry describes it as "a thick hard thong of leather of about three foot and a half

Whether the Tchernitcheffs were put to any degree of torture of this kind and whether they made any compromising confessions we have no means of knowing, all we do know is that Catherine herself seems to have been subjected to an original form of moral torture which was almost unique of its kind. This is described in the *Memoirs*.

In the August of 1746 the Empress Elizabeth commanded the grand-ducal pair to fast as a preliminary to taking the

long, fasten'd to the end of a handsome stick about two Foot and a half long, with a ring or kind of Swivle like a Flail at the end of it, to which the Thong is fasten'd. There are two ways of punishing with this instrument: the first is for lesser Crimes, when the Man that has offended is hoisted up upon the back of another with his Shirt stripped off, and the Hangman, or Knoutavoit Master, strikes him so many Strokes on the bare Back as are appointed by the Judge, first making a step back and giving a Spring forward at every Stroke, which is laid on with that force that the Blood flies at every Stroke, and leaves a wheal behind as thick as a Man's Finger; and these Masters, as the Russ call them, are so exact in their own Work that they very rarely strike two Strokes in the same Place, but lay them on the whole breadth of a Man's Back, by the side of each other with great dexterity, from the top of the Man's Shoulders down the Waste-band of his Breeches. The second and most severe way of giving the Knout (which is otherwise call'd the Pine) is when a Man's Hands are tied together behind his Body, and then drawn up by a Rope tied to his Hands, whilst at the same time a great Weight is fix'd to his Legs; and being thus hoisted up, his Shoulders turn out of Joint, and his Arms become right over his Head, which when done with the Weight still hanging to his Feet, the Executioner is ordered to lay on so many Strokes as are appointed by the Judge, in Manner as I have before describ'd. This Punishment is commonly executed very leisurely, and between whiles a Subdiackshick (or Writer) examines the Sufferer how far he is guilty of the Crimes he stands accused of, or whether he has any Confederates, or is guilty of such other Crimes whereof he is then examin'd such as treasonable Things, or Robbery and Murders that the Authors are not known. This being done they are taken down, and their Arms put into joint again by the Hangman, and then perhaps dismiss'd or sent back to Prison. But if the Crime whereof any Person is accus'd be accounted Capital, and such as deserv'd Death, then there is a further Punishment; there is a gentle Fire made just by the Gallows, and after the Offender (for it does not always prove that they are Criminal) is taken down from the Punishment, and denies the Fact or any part whereof he is accus'd, then his Hands and Feet are ty'd, and he is fix'd on a long Pole as upon a Spit, which being held at each end by two Men, the Person that stands charg'd with Guilt has his raw Back roasted over the Fire, and is then examin'd and call'd upon by a Writer aforesaid to confess. The Writer takes down in Writing all the Answers he makes, and if any Person charg'd with any Capital Crime, in case where the Proof is not clear against him, cannot stand out this variety of Punishment three Several times, which is order'd perhaps three or four Weeks one after the other, without confessing Guilt; or if his Answers that he has made in the time of his Punishment are not judg'd clear and satisfactory, he must after all this Torture suffer Death; but if he be so hardy as to stand it all out without owning himself or being otherwise proved guilty, he is acquitted."

Communion. Every day they had to attend divine service morning and evening. When the time for Confession arrived they discovered the reason for the arbitrary command. Their former spiritual mentor, Todorsky, now Bishop of Pskoff, examined them individually and separately, and asked them repeatedly and categorically what had passed between them and the Tchernitcheffs. As there was absolutely nothing to confess, their ingenuous and frank replies entirely disarmed the good Bishop, who honestly blurted out : " Who could have told the Empress so many stories to the opposite effect ! " At any rate, he appears to have been completely convinced of their innocence, and even to have succeeded in satisfying the Empress as well.

Mme Tchoglokokoff was lamentably lacking in tact ; she not only aroused the hostility of the Grand-Duchess, but seems to have put the entire entourage against herself. Every trivial pleasantry was met by her with a sententious deprecatory phrase, such as : " Talk of that sort would displease Her Majesty." Every movement or wish was repressed with the words : " That would not be approved by Her Majesty." This attitude of austere severity of course reached the ears of the Empress, who reprimanded her, but with faint success.

As the custodian of the " marital fidelity " of the grand-ducal pair it must be confessed that Mme Tchoglokokoff did not justify the confidence reposed in her by the Empress. The first disappointment was the behaviour of the duenna's husband, who, on his return from Vienna, proceeded to fall in love with a lady-in-waiting of Catherine's, Mlle Kosheleff, thereby creating great scandal at Court. Worse still, Count Cyril Rasoumovsky, the brother of the Empress's favourite, actually lost his heart to Catherine, on whom even Tchoglokokoff himself had the temerity of casting his eyes, without even arousing the suspicion of the trusting duenna. Besides, the Grand-Duke paid court in the apartments of Mme Tchoglokokoff, virtually aided and abetted by her, to the young ladies of his wife's household.

But this was not all ; Mme Tchoglokokoff actually conceived it to be her duty to reproach the grand-ducal pair for having no children, and informed them that Her Majesty was very angry with them about this, and was desirous of ascertaining which of the pair was to blame ; she consequently intended to have the

Grand-Duke examined by a doctor and Catherine by a midwife. Although this threat was not actually carried out, Mme Tchoglo-koff permitted herself to give expression to a number of insulting surmises.

The household of the Grand-Duke and Grand-Duchess was subject to constant changes, and whatever the reason for these may have been—Catherine ascribes them to the intrigues of Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, Bilbassoff to those of the Court—they had the effect of preventing the formation of strong attachments to individuals; on the other hand, they also afforded Catherine opportunities for studying character and taught her how to adapt herself to varying circumstances and how to manage the different people with whom she was brought in contact, and it no doubt gave her that ease in her social relationship with others which was later to be one of her greatest and most imperial characteristics.

Moreover, all the personal servants were not equally objectionable. There was, for instance, the old man-servant and oracle Effreinoft, whom Catherine trusted implicitly, whose advice she frequently took, and who was absolutely devoted to her. She was of course not allowed to retain him long. He knew every detail of court etiquette and all the numerous pitfalls by which the young and totally inexperienced Grand-Duchess was surrounded. He warned her against indiscretions and kept her informed of what was going on, and even acted as an intermediary in her clandestine correspondence, for, as we have seen, she was not allowed to write private letters of any kind, not even to her mother. The pretext formed for the dismissal of this faithful and hence much mistrusted servant, was a squabble which he had with a cloak-room attendant. This was duly reported to the Empress, and afforded an excuse for exiling the poor fellow to what was then the remote Tartar town of Kazan.

Catherine was more fortunate in her lady-in-waiting, the frivolous and undesirable Mme Kruse, of whom we shall have to speak again, being replaced later, and at the instance of Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, by Prascovia Vladislavova, who proved to be a most amiable and agreeable companion and a devoted and trusted friend, who gave proofs, in the hour of need, of her fidelity and affection. She was a woman of considerable discretion, and as

astute and resourceful as was to be expected from her long training at Court.

At this point in our narrative it may be interesting to cast a brief glance on the conditions of life at the Russian Court in the mid-eighteenth century. As Bilbassoff wittily remarks, Russia at this time created an illusion of culture in the distance only ; indeed, this resembled the perspective of a scene on the stage and approached perilously near to the vanishing-point ; on closer acquaintance this was actually the case, every illusion disappearing on the first attempt at contact.

On arrival at the Russian Court, Catherine, who had been brought up in frugal but substantial and solid Germany, was blinded by its gold and brocade, its elegance and luxury. A very few years' residence sufficed to convince her that the gold was but tinsel and the elegance depravity.

Peter the Great first put the Court on a European footing. In externals and gorgeous luxury it was in no respect inferior to that of Versailles, the model of all others. Peterhof with its spacious halls, their walls entirely covered with huge mirrors, mosaic on their floors, and painted ceilings, is spoken of by Siebigk as preferred by the most fastidious diplomatists even to Versailles, and as a place which art and nature had combined to make beautiful. In palaces such as this, at the grand courts, balls, and masquerades, courtiers ruffled in silk, satin, and velvet clothes embroidered with gold lace, with ornaments of precious stones, the ladies in bright colours, to which the Empress Elizabeth was partial, all looking absolutely European and behaving with the dignity and distinction of the old nobility of France. At the doors stood guards of honour, servants in livery abounded, the illusion was complete.

The actual life in these palaces often presented strange incongruities to the observant foreigner. The palaces were mostly built of wood, and the houses of the nobility were constructed of the same material. Everything was sacrificed to the saloons and reception-rooms, the bedrooms were small and insignificant. As to the workmanship, ostentatious but uncomfortable, these habitations must be described as jerry-built ; the doors did not close properly, the windows were draughty, the floors were full of chinks, the stoves smoked. The windows of the grand-ducal

apartments in the Summer Palace at St. Petersburg partly overlooked an ill-smelling swamp and partly a narrow and dirty courtyard. In the wooden wing of the palace at Moscow, the water trickled down the skirting of the walls, the rooms were consequently very damp. At the house of the Narishkins in Moscow, on the occasion of a wedding at which the Empress was present, Catherine had to traverse several cold passages to get from one part to another, go up stairs that had not been warmed, and proceed along a gallery hastily constructed of unseasoned wood, from which the water streamed off. The house of the Tchoglokovs consisted of a large central hall and four rooms at each side; there were draughts everywhere, the doors and windows were partly rotten, the floors had chinks of the width of three fingers, and moreover there was an abundance of various kinds of insects.

Catherine witnessed the destruction by fire in three hours of the palace of Moscow, which was about two miles in circumference. One of the houses she occupied was burned three times in one month while she was in it. Among her papers were found the following lines :

“ Jean bâtit une maison
Qui n'a ni rime ni raison ;
L'hiver on y gèle tout roide
L'été ne la rend point froide ;
Il y oublia l'escalier
Puis la bâtit en espalier.”

Badly as the houses were built they were furnished still worse. In those days the furniture was not so much an adjunct of the room as of the occupant of the room, and followed the same about like the clothes and other personal property of this occupant. The *Memoirs* state that the Court was at that time so poor in furniture, that the mirrors, beds, chairs, tables, and cupboards which served the grand-ducal pair in the Winter Palace were moved from there with them to the Summer Palace, and even accompanied them from St. Petersburg to Moscow and back. During these removals a good deal of it was damaged and broken, but it was all put up in the condition in which it might arrive, and hence most of it could only be used with difficulty. If this was the case in the luxurious palaces of the Imperial household, the state of things in private houses was much worse. In the

house of the Tchoglokovs, in which the Grand-Duke and Grand-Duchess were compelled to take refuge after the total destruction by fire of the palace, there was no furniture at all. Six weeks after the birth of Paul, Catherine had to receive the congratulations of the Court and the diplomatic circle in a room which had been empty before and into which gorgeously handsome furniture was hastily brought. She received reclining in a bed covered with pink velvet embroidered with silver, but after the reception all the beautiful furniture was taken away. There seems to have reigned at the palace the most curious mixture of barbaric Asiatic splendour and penurious privation. There was the greatest luxury with respect to superfluities and a total absence of the barest necessities of life. When Catherine presented the Empire with an heir, two rooms were provided for her adjoining the apartments of the Empress in the Summer Palace; the bed, however, was placed between three doors, from all of which there were cruel draughts, and two windows.

One of the doors was boarded up and then hung with heavy curtains, but for all that the draught was so great that the youthful Grand-Duchess contracted rheumatism. On the other hand, barbaric luxury abounded. The washing-basin of the Empress, for instance, was set in precious stones and had been purchased in Constantinople by Count Roumyantzeff for 8000 ducats, there were no chairs, yet the walls were covered with mirrors, which frightened the unsophisticated peasant mother of Count Rasoumovsky, the favourite, when she saw herself reflected in them, tricked out in all the finery of that period, her face rouged with patches on it, and her hair powdered. It is said that she mistook her own grim apparition for the Empress, and executed in front of it the deep court curtsy which she had been laboriously practising for some weeks past.

This kind of life could scarcely be agreeable to Catherine, who had been accustomed to the plain, frugal, and homely but solid and comfortable domestic arrangements of Stettin and the castle of Zerbst, where she had inhabited unostentatious but substantially built dwellings which had stood wind and weather for ages, and were designed to stand them for an eternity to come. They might not have been luxurious, at least they were habitable

and thoroughly *gemüthlich*. Yet now Catherine had to adapt herself to the splendour of these imperial palaces built, fitted out, and furnished for show, but not in any respect for comfort. Here she had to spend her days and nights by the side of a Grand-Duke whose portrait we have endeavoured to trace, without privacy, surrounded by a crowd of observers neither sympathetic nor tactful, as little to be trusted as they were well disposed, and as untruthful and scandal-mongering as they were treacherous and sycophantic.

In the eyes of the outside world, no doubt, the lot of this young and beautiful Princess, for she had in a few years developed a rare and striking beauty of countenance and figure, seemed enviable enough. She appeared at all court functions, balls, masquerades, etc., and she always looked charming and amiable, bright, and even happy. But public receptions and gala days at Court do not constitute the whole of life. Returning to her apartments from the gaieties of the Court she met with no caresses from an admiring husband, there was no person with whom to interchange the ideas teeming in that young and as yet immature brain, no occupation to absorb her thoughts, in fact nothing whatever to do, absolutely no means of killing time. Peter with his dolls and his various tomfoolery, devoid as he was of brains, led a fuller and more interesting life than she. Every kind of occupation, however innocent, was regarded as derogatory to her position; any serious interest in people, things, or institutions was apprehensively redoubted and treated almost as a crime. Fortunately she was allowed to read, and so she spent the early years of her married life in reading the works of French philosophers and romance-writers. She would sit all day, alone and deserted, reading in her room. Sometimes her husband would join her and insist on her walking rapidly up and down the room with him while he talked the most absurd nonsense, to which she had to reply meekly and in which she was expected to take an interest. He would, for instance, discuss a project for building a place of entertainment to resemble a Capucin monastery, in which she and he and the entire household would be attired as Capucin monks, to his mind a most delightful and convenient costume; everybody would have to go out in turn to purchase provisions, etc., and

then he would shake with laughter at the contemplation of his ingenuity. He bored the unfortunate Catherine to death. Is it possible to think of this poor child, barely in her teens, in a strange country, her mother expelled in disgrace, without a friend or person she could trust, thrown entirely on her own resources, watched, spied upon, and slandered, without feeling the deepest pity for her in her lonely and difficult position?

In the summer, especially at Oranienbaum, where Peter had surreptitiously dressed up his servants in the Holstein uniform and drilled them as soldiers, the life led was quite different. Rising at three in the morning Catherine would go out duck-shooting, dressed from head to foot in male attire and accompanied by an old huntsman, what we should call a game-keeper. In nothing but an ordinary fishing-punt she would often even venture out to sea. The Grand-Duke would generally set out about two hours later, loaded with a variety of impediments, especially a luncheon basket; sometimes they would meet and join forces, sometimes not, as the case might be.

The Grand-Duke had as little to do as his consort, and seems to have bored himself considerably. By way of amusement he used to hit upon devices which were particularly unpleasant to Catherine. Thus, for instance, he acquired a pack of hounds in 1747; yet being a poor sportsman he hunted with them but little, his principal amusement being to worry and torment them. In the village of Oranienbaum this hobby caused annoyance to the dogs only, but the Grand-Duke insisted on bringing them to the Winter Palace, which was not allowed. To prevent detection he had a sort of kennel erected in the alcove of his wife's bedroom, and here the dogs, concealed from the eye by boarding, nevertheless made their presence felt to the olfactory sense and led a miserable existence. The Grand-Duke was for ever training and flogging these unfortunate animals, and used to make the whole pack run from one room into another, cracking the whip over them, and shouting like one demented. One day Catherine, hearing most piteous howls, discovered her husband holding a dog in the air by its collar whilst a servant held it up by the tail, the Grand-Duke meantime beating it unmercifully

with the handle of his whip. Another relaxation of this precocious youth was drink. He was frequently intoxicated, and his chests of drawers were stuffed full of bottles which he had succeeded in smuggling into his rooms. A pleasant companion truly, this phenomenal Grand-Duke !

CHAPTER VII

BIRTH OF PAUL

AS we have said, Catherine was now growing into a beautiful woman ; when she came to Russia she had not yet attained her fifteenth year. On her arrival, as we have seen, she got ill, and when she recovered she had grown considerably and was a thin and gawky girl. It was quite three or four years before she completely regained her strength and began to develop into the beauty which she afterwards undoubtedly became. At the age of twenty, however, she was a fine, strong, and healthy woman, full of life and energy. Her youthful vigour found vent in exercise, in shooting, and especially in riding, a diversion of which the Empress Elizabeth was extremely fond. In Germany ladies were not in the habit of riding on horseback at that time. Catherine was not accustomed to this exercise, and first mounted a horse at Moscow in 1744 ; being still very weak, she then took no pleasure in riding, but later she became so accomplished a horsewoman that she even won the approval of the Empress. She preferred riding astride and in male attire like the Empress, but this was strictly prohibited ; Catherine therefore invented a saddle which was capable of being used both ways. This saddle had a movable pommel, which could be turned in such a manner as to admit of riding astride, and when she felt it was safe to do so she would throw her leg over, liberate a concealed stirrup, and ride in the fashion which she preferred.

Thus in the summer the Grand-Duchess spent her days riding and shooting, in the winter she danced. At the big gala balls she usually changed her dress three times in the course of the same evening, and her toilettes were always greatly admired. Whenever a fancy dress at a masquerade or even

an ordinary gown excited special comment she never wore it again, on the principle that a gown having once made an effect that effect would only be weakened by repetition. At the smaller dances in the select court circle to which outsiders were not admitted, she on the contrary dressed as simply as she possibly could, and thereby pleased the Empress, who did not approve of too much elegance on these occasions. On the other hand, at the masquerades, where men appeared as women and women as men, Catherine was always most gorgeously attired, and never once rebuked for her extravagance in this respect.

The *Memoirs* describe one effective costume which seems to have erred on the side of simplicity. Learning that at one particular masquerade everybody had the intention of outshining everybody else, Catherine, in despair, devised for herself a corsage of white *gros de Tours*, with a skirt of the same material with a small farthingale. Her long and thick hair she brushed back, tied in a white ribbon *en queue de renard*. On her head she wore a single rose with a few buds and leaves, and she had another in her bodice. Thus attired she presented herself to the Empress, who exclaimed at the simplicity of her dress and insisted on putting a patch on her cheek with her own hands, to the delight of Catherine, who with great glee showed the Empress's patch to the latter's favourites as well as to her own entourage. [It is in this part of the *Memoirs* that a rather significant passage occurs :

"I do not remember ever hearing in the whole of my life so many praises from all quarters as I did that evening. Everybody declared I was as beautiful as the day, and somehow particularly attractive. Truth to tell, I never counted myself as very beautiful, but I pleased, and therein, I believe, lay my power."

At that time many had already experienced that power, Catherine alone being quite unconscious of it. It is charming to watch this innocent and attractive young Princess pursuing her course unharmed and unsuspecting among the pitfalls of this corrupt and dissolute Court, and pathetic to think that this immunity from evil was to be of but short duration after all.

One of her devoted and most chivalrous admirers was Count Cyril Rasoumovsky, Hetman of the Cossacks, and the eccentric but noble-hearted brother of Elizabeth's favourite. When in later years Catherine asked this bluff courtier for what reason he so frequently visited the Tchoglokovs in those early days, he bluntly replied that he was in love. At a loss to imagine who the object of his affections might have been, Catherine asked him with whom he could possibly have been in love at the time. "With you," was the unceremonious and embarrassing reply. Later, Tchoglokov, a fair, fat and stupid, insolent person, the master of her husband's household, commenced to pay her marked attention. But this unattractive person found little favour in her eyes.

More dangerous was a harmless flirtation with a handsome Count Tchernitcheff, in this case, however, although his adulation pleased her unaccustomed ears and tickled her vanity, she had the good sense to break off all communications on his offering to disguise himself as a footman in order to have the privilege of being near her.

It was otherwise with Saltykov, whose name the French always spell Soltikoff. There were at the Court of Elizabeth at that time two brothers, Peter and Serge Soltikoff (or Saltykov), the sons of Aide-de-camp-General Soltikoff, whose wife, a Princess Golitzyn by birth, enjoyed the Empress's special favour, in return for services rendered in assisting Elizabeth to mount the throne. It is said that she aided personally in debauching the guards, drank and gambled with them, losing not only her money but her honour to these amorous conspirators. Of these two brothers, Peter is described as a perfect fool, with a stupid face, large, protuberant, leaden eyes, a turned-up nose, and a mouth perpetually half-open. Serge is on the other hand depicted as a beautiful and incomparable person, possessed of the charming and insinuating manners only to be acquired in the very best society and at Court. He had considerable ability, but suffered from a defect not uncommon at that period: he was totally devoid of principles of any kind. He belonged to one of the oldest families of Russia which had intermarried with, and considered itself as good as that of, the Imperial house. Serge had made a love match and was supposed to be

devoted to his beautiful young wife. In 1752 Catherine began to notice that Serge Soltikoff came to Court more often than necessary, and that he was particularly attentive to the Tchoglokovs, people who could hardly have appealed to him for their own sakes. Mme Tchoglokov was at that time in an interesting condition and repeatedly indisposed. She would frequently invite Catherine to come and spend the evening with her, and whenever Catherine came, she found among the company one Leo Narishkin, playing the fool, her own lady-in-waiting, Princess Gagarine, and, besides a number of others, invariably Serge Soltikoff. At the famous grand-ducal concerts Tchoglokov with his attentions was rather a trial to Catherine, until the adroit Soltikoff discovered in him a talent for poetry and made him sit down, generally behind the stove, and compose verses, Leo Narishkin suggesting a subject and praising extravagantly the resultant metrical product. At the Tchoglokovs, whilst the husband was in labour with his verses, Mme Tchoglokov was induced to sing, the rest of the company conversing freely and merrily on "all sorts of subjects." It is easy to imagine how delightful these free-and-easy reunions must have been to the bored but lively Grand-Duchess, whose time hung so heavily on her hands.

On one of these occasions Soltikoff took an opportunity, while Tchoglokov was busy over his verses and Mme Tchoglokov was delighting the company with her charming voice, to tell Catherine the real reason for his constant presence at these entertainments. Catherine was young, fancy free, and evidently well disposed to this gay Lothario, and instead of rebuking and repelling him at once, betrayed her own interest in his affections by inquiring what his beautiful wife, whom he had but recently married, would say to such sentiments. Soltikoff replied that all was not gold that glittered, and that he had to pay dearly for his foolish temporary infatuation.

In a very remarkable dispatch from M. de Champeaux fils, dated 8th September 1758, the Soltikoff incident is graphically described, and a pen-picture of this seductive courtier is given. We are there told that "il était fait pour s'attirer tous les regards dans une Cour où les dehors séduisants et aimables ont un si grand empire." M. de Champeaux fils continues to say that

he had a most pleasant appearance, spoke with great delicacy, affected the noblest sentiments, and suggests that there was something of the comedian in his airs and graces. Fairly honest in character he was nevertheless vainglorious to excess, and possessed a strong strain of levity. He was prepared to risk exile to Siberia for an intrigue, and would yet turn tail at the mere sight of a sword. He was sensible and candid with those who did not stand in his way, and jealous of any possible rival. He lacked suppleness of mind and that finesse so indispensable at a Court where tricks and intrigues abounded. His mind was adorned with frivolities, and his bad early training, such as so frequently took the place of education in Russia, was the cause of some of his defects, whilst it had choked the germs of his finer qualities. According to M. de Champeaux, Soltikoff was the favourite of the Grand-Duke, who could not live without him; he says: "*Le Grand Duc ne pouvait s'en séparer; souvent il couchait avec lui,*" and calls him the director of the pleasures of his Court.

He certainly seems to have been fully aware of the physical defects of Peter, for M. de Champeaux tells us how he effected his cure. There was a grand ball at Court at which Mme Narishkin, Soltikoff's sister-in-law, who was then in an interesting condition, was present. While Soltikoff was talking to her the Empress passed and said to the lady she wished she could impart some of her virtue to the Grand-Duchess, to which Mme Narishkin replied that this was not so difficult a matter, but that if she had permission she believed that with the assistance of M. de Soltikoff she could succeed. The Empress demanded an explanation, and Mme Narishkin told her wherein the difficulty lay, and that M. Soltikoff possessed the Grand-Duke's entire confidence. Not only did the Empress approve, she said Soltikoff, if successful, would render her a great service. Thereupon, according to M. de Champeaux, Soltikoff did all he could to persuade the heir apparent to take the necessary steps. He dwelt on the political advantages as well as the pleasures of parentage, and painted in glowing colours the delights of connubial happiness. A supper was immediately arranged to which the persons in whose society the Grand-Duke most delighted were bidden, and when the Grand-Duke's spirits

had been raised to their highest pitch he was prevailed upon to summon the surgeon who was in attendance. The result justified the most sanguine anticipations. According to ancient Russian usage the Grand-Duke presented to the Empress in due course the evidences of his wife's innocence. In the meantime the zeal of Soltikoff had nearly brought about his ruin. His enemies at once proceeded to blacken his character and to find an explanation for his anxiety to provide an heir to the throne, which was as dangerous to him as it was little flattering to the virtue of Catherine. In the *Memoirs* we are told that Mme Tchogloloff had actually recommended Catherine to take a lover in the interests of the dynasty, and had even hinted that the Empress would approve such a course, Soltikoff being one of the likely people indicated to her as possibly suitable.

M. de Champeaux reports that Soltikoff, on hearing what was being said of him, sought the Grand-Duke, who received him somewhat coldly at first, but ended by embracing him, assuring him that enemies had maligned him, but that the Grand-Duke was as well disposed to him as ever. Soltikoff now represented that he had heard talk of Siberia, and insisted on having his character rehabilitated in the eyes of the Empress. The Grand-Duke consequently repaired at once to Her Imperial Majesty and pleaded for Soltikoff, representing that anybody who was a friend of his was invariably selected to be made the object of intrigues and calumnies. He said that in Holstein and even in Sweden he would have been allowed to retain his friends, and that if the Empress had called him to a higher destiny this would seem to have been on the condition of his sacrificing everybody to whom he felt attached. If this were indeed the case, he pleaded that Soltikoff might at least be permitted to retire to his estates instead of being banished to Siberia for the services he had rendered him.

The Empress, greatly surprised at the Grand-Duke's fervour, was graciously pleased to accede to his request, but she pointed out to the Grand-Duke that whilst she was well aware of the services Soltikoff had rendered him, it would be necessary to await the convalescence of the Grand-Duke and obtain proofs of the virtuousness of his consort. Champeaux says that Peter reported this conversation to Soltikoff, who is believed to have

caused it to be repeated to Catherine. That Princess, beside herself with grief, sought out the Grand-Duke and told him very plainly that calumnies like these reflected as much on him as on her, and that he must protest against them. She then demanded an audience of the Empress, to whom she exhibited a lively agitation. She asked to know the names of the people who had dared to slander her, and said that such persons were too guilty and too dangerous to her, for her not to be told who they were. The Empress, who had been surprised by the attitude of the Grand-Duke, was affected by that of Catherine. She embraced the latter, and bursting into tears, as was her emotional and amiable wont, assured her of her affection and friendship, and exhorted her to pay no attention to malicious rumours from which even sovereigns were not immune.

The same day Soltikoff, who had already received a very handsome diamond as a present from the Empress, was asked by her, whilst at cards, whether he had luck, to which he replied : "Never." She then asked him whether he persisted in his determination to drink the waters on his estates ; and on his replying that he was leaving next day, and that his health required it, she added that she wished him to keep well and to remain about the Grand-Duke.

M. de Champeaux fils, continuing his narrative, relates the particulars to which we have referred above, and how the Grand-Duke, having been put on his metal by what the Empress had said to him, "*il voulut la satisfaire sur les particularités qu'elle avait désiré savoir, et, le matin de la nuit où le mariage fut consommé, il envoya dans une cassette scellé de sa propre main à cette Princesse les preuves de la sagesse de la Grande-Duchesse. Ainsi fut terminée cette étrange scène.*"

Champeaux adds that the liaison between the Grand-Duchess and Soltikoff continued for eight years, the Grand-Duke retaining for him for the whole of that time the same sentiments.

Here it may be permitted to observe that whilst in Russia there appears to exist no doubt in the minds of all historians that Soltikoff was the lover, if not the first lover, of Catherine, the evidence in favour of this view is scarcely very convincing. That their names were coupled together proves nothing. In that scandal-mongering Court no one was sacred, and the most

revolting crimes, to say nothing of the grossest vices, were imputed to everybody with an impartiality almost praiseworthy. The *Memoirs*, although they contain most invaluable data, must, for obvious reasons, be open to suspicion wherever it is a question of a material incriminating fact, and the reports of contemporaries are naturally tinged with the colour of the scandals of the time. What is remarkable and must be taken in conjunction with the surrounding facts is that there is great anxiety at Court for many years about the succession, that hints are dropped, that Catherine is given to understand that a *faux pas* in the interests of the dynasty would be winked at, and yet for years there is no question of a flirtation, there are no prospects of heirs. The incompetence of the Grand-Duke Peter is common knowledge. He does not seem to seek his wife's society, but prefers to associate with doubtful characters, of whom Soltikoff would appear to be one, and his calf-love for various ladies of the Court is a source of ridicule rather than of romance. All at once, and after several years, the necessary measures are taken, and from that time are to be recorded several *fausses couches* culminating at last in the birth of Paul, who in appearance and character bore so strong a resemblance to Peter that it seems quite unnecessary to seek for a parent elsewhere.

At this time Catherine was developing, unfolding her charms like a rosebud. Her mind was highly cultured, she spent her time reading the masters of French literature, when she was not exercising her youthful physique either by sport, by riding, or by dancing. Most of the persons at that Court seemed to have repelled her, and the very *Memoirs*, in which are found the facts supposed to be incriminating, breathe an atmosphere of moral and physical health, sanity, and purity. There is no evidence of any morbid feverishness or passion, it all reflects the calmness and serenity of an unimpassioned philosophic mind.

Soltikoff suddenly arrives, and we are to assume that Catherine immediately falls a victim to his charms, forgets prudence and duty, and runs serious risks both for herself and her lover. It seems incredible and would be rejected as untrue did we not know that if Soltikoff was the first he was not the last of Catherine's lovers. The case of Poniatovski, as we shall presently see, is very different. For eight years Soltikoff con-

tinued the friend of the grand-ducal pair ; for eight years, that man, watched and hated, was able to maintain his position without exciting the jealousy or suspicion of Peter. Indeed, on one occasion Peter is reported to have said to a young lady who was supposed to be his mistress that Soltikoff and his wife were making a fool of Tchoglokov, who was in love with Catherine and counted on Soltikoff to plead his cause, whilst the latter, being also in love with her, confined his efforts to pushing his own suit. Catherine, on the other hand, hated Tchoglokov and only tolerated Soltikoff because he was amusing and because through his intermediary she could make Tchoglokov do whatever she wanted ; as a matter of fact, however, she really made fun of both. Peter added that he thought it might be best to disillusion Tchoglokov in order that the latter should know that Peter was his true friend and not Catherine.

When Catherine arrived at the Summer Palace of St. Petersburg in the September of 1754 she was shown the rooms which had been prepared for her confinement ; they were adjoining the apartments of the Empress Elizabeth, and had but one exit. They were gloomy and poorly furnished. Here Catherine felt that she would be left virtually alone, without company, abandoned like an orphan. She seems to have complained, but with no effect. On the 20th September her child was born. It was immediately named Paul by the Empress's chaplain and then spirited away by Elizabeth, and was not again seen by Catherine for a considerable time. Indeed the Empress Elizabeth was so devoted to this infant that the scandalous Court invented a legend to the effect that Paul was not the child of Catherine at all, but the offspring of Elizabeth herself. According to another story, the real child of Catherine was still-born ; some said it was a girl, and that the child of an obliging Finnish peasant woman was substituted in its stead.

Thus, while on the one hand the parentage is ascribed to Soltikoff, on the other a doubt has been cast on the identity of the child itself. These extravagant stories would appear to neutralize each other. While the supposed Finnish origin of Paul might have accounted for his snub-nose, the child certainly did not inherit the beauty and graces of either his alleged mother, Elizabeth, or his reputed father, Soltikoff. His character in

later life, however, did bear a strong resemblance to that of the arbitrary, unreasonable, and virtually half-witted Peter; in stature and physique, too, he exhibited none of the sturdy characteristics of the Finnish peasantry, or of the stately mien of the majestic Empress, rather did he present the puny and half-developed appearance of the unfortunate husband of Catherine. Had he been the child of Soltikoff it is probable that his mother would have exhibited a greater tenderness for him; as it was, it must be confessed that she betrayed as little affection for her son as she had shown regard for her unattractive husband. It is generally admitted that Paul was mad, and while there is no evidence of insanity in Soltikoff, the mental apparatus of Peter was, to say the least, of anything but a high order; and as Catherine and Peter were cousins, the insanity of Paul would seem to afford yet another argument in favour of his being the authentic offspring of this unpropitious union.

Deprived of her child, Catherine was left alone and unattended, and lay in great pain. Whether the pathetic story she relates of her neglect in this unhappy position is worthy of credence, or whether it has been interpolated at a later date by the adherents of the Elizabeth maternity theory, it is impossible to judge. In any case, Elizabeth seems to have been free of physical disabilities at the time, or she could not have been present and carried the child away; besides, this story of the abandonment of Catherine, who later received a present of Rs.100,000 from Elizabeth, sounds improbable, not to say apocryphal.

It is at least interesting to note that the Marquis de l'Hôpital, the French Envoy to the Court of St. Petersburg, to whom the Memoir of de Champeaux was sent in 1758 in order to post him, made the following comment upon it: "There is a foundation of truth in this tragi-comic romance, which is embellished by its style, but viewed at close quarters the hero and heroine would cause it to lose much of its value, for M. de Saltykoff is a vain person and a Russian dandy, which means that he is ignorant, without taste and without merit. The Grand-Duchess cannot abide him, and all that is said regarding the intercourse and exchange of letters with M. de Saltykoff is vain boastfulness and falsehood."

In the meantime it would appear that Catherine, having

at last performed her duty and presented an heir to the Russian Imperial House, had ceased to be a person of importance. Abandoned to the sole care of her waiting-woman she was left alone in a bed situated in a cold room and placed between a door and two enormous windows, through which there blew an icy draught. She was not allowed to move, for two days she was practically neglected, whilst the Grand-Duke was enjoying himself with his boon companions in the adjoining apartments. The Rs.100,000 which the Empress sent her as a reward for having done her duty was accompanied by a few indifferent jewels. Catherine was pleased with the money for she was heavily in debt, but her joy was to be of short duration. Her amiable spouse, on hearing of the donation, began to sulk and to complain that he, the father, had received nothing. For the generous Empress it was no effort to sign another Treasury order for a further Rs.100,000 for Peter, but it was not quite so easy to find the money. The Keeper of the Privy Purse, Baron Tcherkassoff, in order to save appearances, implored Catherine to surrender her money so as to enable him to comply with the Empress's orders, for there was not a copper copeck in the Treasury. In six weeks' time the "purification" of Catherine was celebrated with great pomp, and she was allowed to see her child, who was, however, jealously spirited away again.

Soltikoff also was sent abroad to announce the auspicious intelligence at foreign Courts, and made no attempt to see Catherine before he left, although she wrote her mother a sort of letter of introduction concerning him.

Historians have thought that the dispatch of Soltikoff as Envoy was a sort of disgrace and further evidence in favour of his parentage of Paul. It would, however, seem improbable that the putative father of the child should have been selected for this purpose. On the contrary, the mere fact of his being employed on this mission would suggest that no suspicion attached to him at the time. Let us sum up the evidence and examine what grounds there are for supposing that Soltikoff was really the lover of Catherine and the father of Paul.

Catherine's *Memoirs* have been construed to convey this meaning, but unsupported by other evidence they cannot be depended on. The history of these *Memoirs* is far from satis-



THE GRAND DUKE PAUL.

factory. Found by Kurakin after Catherine's death, they were handed by him to Paul, the astute Kurakin having previously made a copy of them. This copy was recopied, and copies were constantly being surreptitiously made even after Nicholas I had called them all in. When later Herzen, the exiled Nihilist, obtained and published such a copy there is no guarantee, even assuming the scrupulous good faith of Herzen, that this copy was absolutely correct, made from the authentic original, without interpolations or additions. That Catherine herself really wrote her own *Memoirs* may or may not be true, but that these alleged *Memoirs*, after having been surreptitiously copied by a great many scribes for about half a century, should have retained their original form without errors, due in some cases perhaps to carelessness, and without wilful additions to, and perversions of, the text, appears so improbable as to be almost incredible.

Whether the *Memoirs* are authentic or not it is difficult to determine. They certainly contain a number of minute details which bear an air of verisimilitude, and Russian historians have, so to say, swallowed them whole. But even supposing them to be authentic, it is difficult to believe that the gross improbabilities and contradictions have not been clumsily interpolated. We certainly miss in these *Memoirs* the mature and sagacious reflections which we might have expected to find in the writings of so great and brilliant a woman, whose letters prove that she was an adept at putting her ideas on paper. Moreover, in a letter to Grimm dated 22nd June 1790, she says: "I do not know what Diderot means by my *Memoirs*; but what is certain is that I have never written any, and if it be a sin not to have done so then I must plead guilty."

We have seen that Soltikoff was the favourite of Peter, that to make himself agreeable to the Empress he persuaded Peter to put himself in the surgeon's hands, and that he was rewarded for his pains. We have no evidence of a romantic episode. On the contrary, after the birth of Paul, Soltikoff disappears. He takes no interest in Catherine, and even in the *Memoirs* Catherine complains of his neglect. When Catherine's feelings were really stirred, and her young imagination and affections really awakened, she betrayed a romantic and poetic nature, but so far her life had been decorous and uneventful. Her favourite

occupation was to read solid authors, such as Bayle and Montesquieu. She appears to have had an absolute loathing for her husband, who never took a bath, and refused indignantly to make an exception for the benefit of his health, on the ground that he had never had one all his life, and was not going to adopt these foolish Russian customs. He was constantly drunk, his favourites were persons of undesirable character, and later he developed a taste for fat and ugly mistresses which must have been the reverse of flattering to Catherine's vanity.

This Grand-Duke Peter hated his wife; he was jealous of her brains and despised her for her elegance. He was always abusing her, when he was not making use of her. It seems incredible that this selfish and utterly unprincipled person should not have tried to get rid of her at this stage, as he certainly tried to do later, if he had suspected a liaison. Nor were there wanting persons whose interest it was to poison his mind against her. Bestoujeff-Ryoumin considered her as his enemy at first, and kept her under close observation, as we have seen, her every movement being reported. There were, moreover, the envoys of foreign powers who had regarded the marriage with disfavour, and were distinctly hostile to her.

That people in a Court so corrupt as that of Elizabeth should have invented scandals about Catherine is perfectly natural; it would have been surprising indeed if they had not. But that notwithstanding her isolation, her numerous enemies, and the absence of friends, Catherine should have maintained her position as she did, speaks volumes. She had her romance, love's young dream, for she was a daughter of the eighteenth century, and where her affections were concerned she had but little room for scruples, self-restraint, or even prudence, but she displayed the great qualities which her *grande passion* awakened at a later stage.

Soltikoff too, who was currying favour with the Empress, and whose entire career, his friendship with Peter, and his mother's antecedents, point to the complacent courtier rather than to the man of reckless passion, does not appear, personal coward as he was, to have been the sort of man to risk his life for the sake of a Princess who was the object of so much jealousy, suspicion, and hatred, and whom Peter must already at that early date have

talked of divorcing. Soltikoff was certainly not the sort of man to walk into a trap laid for him, if we are to believe the *Memoirs*, by Mme Tchogloloff, who was acting under the instructions of Bestoujeff-Ryoumin.

The theory that Paul was the son of Elizabeth and not of Catherine at all, presupposes that Catherine's own child was exchanged for that of Elizabeth and probably murdered. Yet Elizabeth was, as we have seen, present at the birth of Catherine's child, a fact hardly consistent with this theory ; the only apparent grounds on which it is based being the inordinate fondness of Elizabeth for Catherine's child, which she carried away from its mother's arms and jealously guarded and watched over, though not in the most judicious manner, the child's life being actually endangered by inexpert treatment. That a story of the kind should have got into circulation at the time is not inexplicable, seeing that to a scandal-mongering Court any story, however improbable, would be preferred to the simple and obvious truth. That truth seems so obvious to us to-day that it would be difficult to understand why recourse should have been had to invention, did we not know that the tendency of human nature is to prefer an improbable scandalous mystery to a simple, plain, straightforward explanation of any fact. At this distance of time it does not appear to us at all extraordinary that Elizabeth should have been transported with joy at the arrival of the much-desired heir to the throne, and that she should have jealously, even though injudiciously, watched over it. After all, Catherine did the same in the case of the two eldest sons of Paul, and yet when Alexander was born in 1777, Catherine being forty-eight, nobody suspected that he was the child of any other woman than his reputed mother. Elizabeth, who was born in 1709, was forty-five at the birth of Paul, only about three years younger than was Catherine in 1777.

Had Paul been the son of Finnish peasants, as has been pretended on account of his snub nose, these mysterious parents would surely have been heard of later. It seems highly improbable that nobody should have been able to trace their identity, nobody been aware of, or betrayed, their existence.

All these fantastic tales are wild and improbable. The simple, obvious, and prosaic fact would seem to be that Paul

was indeed the son of Peter, whom he so strongly resembled in mind, body, and character. Even Masson admits the similarity. But this so simple and obvious view is as repugnant to the romantic as it is distasteful to the scandal-mongers.

Some people have thought that the parentage of Paul, beyond affording scope for ingenious imagination, was of little real interest besides. But a moment's reflection will show that if a Nihilist, like say Herzen, could prove that Paul was illegitimate, the dynasty would lose historical sanction, and the people would have less scruple in overthrowing it.

CHAPTER VIII

COUNT STANISLAUS PONIATOVSKI

AFTER the birth of Paul the position of Catherine underwent a considerable change. She had performed her duty, and little more was either expected or hoped of her. To use a convenient Americanism, she now "took a back seat." Her husband found greater pleasure in the opulent charms of his mistresses than in her society, and she was left more than ever to herself and her books. On the other hand, the succession having been assured, there was less reason for the rigid enforcement of the rules of conduct, which, as we have seen, had been drawn up by Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, and so the facile Court relaxed its surveillance over Catherine. If she had become of less importance she at least enjoyed more freedom than before. In the following year, 1755, the *Memoirs* record how she used to slip out of the palace disguised in male attire, while her husband was at supper, and attend the parties of her friends, to return, unsuspected and undiscovered, before bedtime.¹ In this way she varied the monotony of her existence.

But if she had lost importance from a dynastic point of view, it would appear that her intellectual powers were beginning to be recognized, and that she was slowly but surely gaining an unostentatious but none the less real mental ascendancy over those with whom she was brought in contact. Her imperious, or shall we say masterful, nature, which had prompted her to take almost unconsciously the lead in the childish games of her little play-fellows in Stettin, now caused her to exhibit, quite as unconsciously, the powers of her mind—a mind whose natural keenness and aptitude had been stimulated and fortified by reflection and study, for which years of neglect and virtual

¹ This is confirmed by Sir C. Hanbury Williams.

seclusion had afforded such abundant opportunity. It was in the school of adversity and persecution, in monotonous solitude, that her mind was involuntarily trained and nourished. All who had dealings with her were struck by her mental attainments, the shrewdness of her outlook on the world, the common sense tempered by wit of her remarks, the bright vivacity of her disposition, the alertness of her intelligence. And people seemed to succumb imperceptibly to the charm and cleverness of this Cinderella on the steps of the Imperial throne. Bestoujeff-Ryoumin even, who had at first regarded her, and very justifiably, as the enemy, the opponent of his patriotic policy, and therefore as a foe to the true interests of his country, gradually came to see that she had brains, and to recognize that, in the event of Peter's accession, the guiding intellect would be hers. Already it had been noticed that Peter, who was so little attracted to her physically, and who sought his pleasures in very different company, never failed to consult his clever little consort in matters of serious moment, and generally acted on her sagacious advice, for she had got him out of many a scrape, and helped him through more than one difficulty. Bestoujeff-Ryoumin therefore set to work to win over the friendship of this young lady, barely out of her teens, who was likely to become so powerful a factor in the State, and, greatly to the credit of both parties, he seems to have succeeded ultimately.

The Empress Elizabeth, in the few moments for reflection which she was able to snatch from the more important business of self-indulgence and so-called pleasure, although she appears to have had a very genuine affection for her kinswoman, seems to have developed towards her, as time went on, a feeling somewhat akin to jealousy. We find that whenever there was any question between these two exalted ladies, any difference or conflict, that Catherine seemed to get the better of Elizabeth, in most cases by reason of her sensibility and gentleness. This of course may be only an impression conveyed by the *Memoirs*, in which Catherine very naturally appears in a more or less heroic light, but it must at least have been annoying to Elizabeth to find her leading statesmen and even the envoys of foreign countries courting the favour of the insignificant little German Princess who owed her position entirely to the grace of the Empress.

That the foreign envoys took Catherine seriously, studied her character, and endeavoured to make her well-disposed towards them, appears clearly from their dispatches to their respective Governments. Amongst these no one was more assiduous or more successful than Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, the astute representative of Great Britain. But not even he was more concerned to secure the friendship and goodwill of the heir apparent and his consort than the sagacious Frederick II of Prussia. This shrewd monarch had very soon discovered the deficiencies of Peter, of whom he writes: "The Grand-Duke is extraordinarily indiscreet in his utterances, for the most part in conflict with the Empress, but little respected, indeed more properly speaking he is despised, by the people, and generally much too much taken up with his Holstein."

As early as 1747 Finkensteen informed the King that he did not believe that Peter, on account of the poor state of his health, would ever live to reign, but that if he did he would most certainly be murdered before long, as he was extremely unpopular.

Frederick II was very anxious to establish relations with Catherine, but, owing to the restriction of her correspondence, this was impossible. It was not until the arrival in St. Petersburg of Williams that Frederick was able to get frequent and regular news of his reputed daughter.

Sir Charles Hanbury Williams was the scion of an old Worcestershire family, and was born in 1709. A friend of Sir Robert Walpole's, he sat in Parliament as a staunch Whig, but did not gain distinction for eloquence. In society his brilliant and mordant wit and the elegance of his manners attracted attention, and his reputation as a man of fashion and taste was enhanced by his satirical verses. An accomplished man of the world who enjoyed life and knew how to turn his opportunities to advantage, he seemed designed by nature for the diplomatic career which he embraced in 1747. Appointed in that year Minister to the then remarkable and dissipated Court of Dresden, his talents had now full play, and he sent home dispatches and letters which exhibited the vivacity of his mind and the extent of his powers of observation. In 1750 he was transferred to Berlin, where Frederick II found his caustic repartees too sub-acid even for him, and he was consequently recalled and once more

accredited to Dresden. During his prolonged stay at the Court of Augustus III, who was also King of Poland, Williams had frequent occasion to visit Warsaw, where he became acquainted with the distinguished and charming Czartoryski family. A Princess Czartoryski had married a Count Poniatovski. The Poniatovskis, although an old and noble family, were far from having the standing of the Czartoryskis, who were royalties in all but name. The marriage was regarded as in the nature of a *mésalliance*, and Stanislaus, its fruit, who was born in 1732, was sent at an early age to Dresden and later to Paris to make his career. In Paris he had a great success, for he was an attractive young man with a singularly pleasing appearance, and that marvellous charm and seductiveness of manner of which even to-day the Polish nobility would seem alone to possess the secret. According to one account, Poniatovski, who had been launched into Parisian society by the Swedish Ambassador, lived considerably above his means and was eventually thrown into prison for debt, from whence he was ransomed by the amorous generosity of the wife of a wealthy French merchant. No doubt to a young man of his spirit, the position in which he was now placed was intolerable, for he escaped to London, where he moved in the best society and met the friend of his uncle's, Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, who had just been appointed Minister to St. Petersburg and was recommended to take this perfect courtier and accomplished gallant of not quite twenty-three with him. The Count accepted the flattering offer, but did not arrive at the northern capital until the end of the June of 1755, and about a fortnight after the Minister had been received by, and presented his credentials to, the Empress Elizabeth. Frederick II was at that time without a representative in Russia, and gladly seized on the offer of Sir Charles Hanbury Williams's unofficial services.

Poniatovski has left us in his *Mémoires Secrètes et Inédites* a vivid picture of his sojourn in the northern capital, which does not materially differ from other accounts on record, but is in many particulars more detailed and certainly more vivacious.

"It was Williams," he says, "who was charged to inform Bestoujeff, then Grand-Chancellor of Russia, of the secret which had eluded him for more than six months, in spite of his vigilance

and his spies, and even in spite of his extreme and particular desire to direct the affections of a Princess whom he idolized to such a degree as to be almost in love with her himself. He had vainly endeavoured to supply her with lovers of his own finding, and he had for this purpose cast his eyes upon Count Lehadroff (?) amongst others (this Count died a few years later), who had been presented at Court on the same day as I was, and whose praises the courtiers expressly sang to the Princess that very evening. She replied that of the two the Pole pleased her most. This remark, let drop without an object at the time, was not lost to Alexander Narishkin, then Gentleman of the Chamber, now Grand Master of the Horse, who shortly afterwards made my acquaintance, sought to become intimate, reported the above remark to me, and was always telling me things calculated to give rise to hope. For a long time I would not even listen to him, for my mind had been armed against the intrigues and espionages of all courts in general, and especially of the terrifying dangers of the one at which I found myself."

Poniatovski then proceeds to explain the poor esteem he had conceived for Catherine. He had heard the stories about Soltikoff, he suspected her Prussian leanings, which he detested, and he held in abhorrence her reputed Voltaireanism. In short, he says, he thought her so different from what she really was, that he carefully refused to walk into the traps which Narishkin set for him.

But one day at Court, Poniatovski described in rather glowing terms to Narishkin the beauties of a lady whom he had seen there, and shortly afterwards the Grand-Duchess in passing repeated smilingly the words he had used, adding : " I perceive you are an artist."

This decided him to risk a *billet-doux*, to which the reply was handed him by Narishkin, and Poniatovski eloquently adds : " Thereupon I forgot that there was a Siberia."

His description of his introduction, without warning, to Catherine's apartment is thrilling. Her age at the time was, he says, twenty-five, and she was in the zenith of her beauty. Whilst her hair was black, her complexion was of a dazzling whiteness, with the most brilliant colouring. Her large bright blue eyes were speaking, her lashes were long and dark. She had a Greek

nose, a mouth which simply invited the kiss, perfect hands and arms, and an elegant figure, rather tall than short, a graceful and noble carriage, a voice with a most pleasant sound, and a laugh as merry as her disposition, which latter enabled her to alternate with ease from childish madcap play to the most difficult and serious work. The restraint in which she had lived since her marriage, the absence of all congenial society, had driven her to seek solace in books. She was very caressing in her manner and quick to find the weak side of others. She was already winning the hearts of the people, and all unwittingly paving the way to that throne which she was later to fill so gloriously.

Poniatovski would have us believe that he was at the time an innocent boy unsullied by contact with the world. He had frequented none but good society, and had avoided vice and low company, for, he says, he was ambitious and had his way to make.

Williams informed Bestoujeff of this idyll in order to prevent him from bringing back Soltikoff, through whom the Minister hoped to rule Catherine. But Soltikoff, another proof if one were needed that he had never been her lover, had shown but little interest in the Grand-Duchess, and is reported to have even avoided her society before he was sent abroad, so little did he evidently hope to be able to play a leading rôle in the life of the future Empress of Russia. As we shall see later, Russian courtiers were not squeamish, and often dissembled an affection they never felt with the object of satisfying their ambition rather than their passions, which they too frequently ostentatiously indulged in other quarters.

Poniatovski has left us his portrait, which he said he drew up at the request of Catherine. It betrays abnormal introspection and self-consciousness in one so young, but seems to bear the stamp of honesty and truth.

He begins: "I would be satisfied with my appearance if I were an inch taller, if my legs were more shapely, my nose less aquiline, if I had a smaller mouth, a better eye-sight, and if my teeth showed a little more. Even with all these improvements I do not consider that I would be really good-looking, but I do not desire to be more so, for I think my face has an air of nobility



THE GRAND DUCHESS CATHERINE

and is full of meaning and interest, and that there is a note of quality in my gestures and deportment which is sufficiently distinguished to attract attention anywhere. My downcast look, at first, often gives me a sombre and embarrassed air, but this does not last, and as soon as that first moment has passed, I have on the contrary the defect of often appearing too proud. The excellent education which I have received has been very useful in helping me to neutralize the defects of my appearance and my mind, and to turn both the one and the other to advantage beyond their real value. I am sufficiently intelligent to be equal to any conversation, but not sufficiently fertile to take the lead frequently or for long, unless it be on a subject in which my sentiments are involved, or the taste which nature has given me for everything that has relation to art. I have a keen sense of humour and am quick to detect what is false in all things, and the oddities of others, and I am often too reckless in allowing people to feel this. I hate low company, for which I have a natural antipathy. A large share of laziness has prevented me from developing my talents and extending my knowledge as much as I might. When I work it is by inspiration. I do a great deal straight off, or nothing at all. I do not commit myself lightly and hence appear to be more clever than I really am. With regard to what is called the management of affairs I am generally too frank and betray too much earnestness, and consequently often make a mess of things. I could judge a matter well, and could detect the weak points in a scheme or in the person who wishes to carry it out, but I need advice and restraint to prevent me from making mistakes myself. I am extremely sensible to sadness and joy, but more to the first than the last, and if I had not the presentiment of a great good fortune in store for me in the future, I should be a prey to melancholy. Born with a great and burning ambition, the idea of the reformation and glory of my country and the hope of being useful to it have been, as it were, the groundwork of my life. I did not consider myself cut out for a ladies' man."

Poniatovski continues to describe himself as a good friend, who, though quick to discover the faults of his neighbours, is sufficiently candid to recognize his own humiliating deficiencies. He is more fond of giving than of taking, confesses himself a

bad manager, but asserts that he can keep the secrets of others better than his own. He pleads guilty to a keen love of approbation, and admits that his vanity would have been excessive had not the fear of ridicule and the usages of good society restrained him. He adds that he cannot tell lies, not only because this is against his principles, but because he is by nature averse to falsehood and insincerity. He loves God, and is devoted to his parents, not so much from a sense of duty as from pure affection. He is incapable of revenge, his sense of pity being too great, and he fears that the ease with which he forgives is a sign of weakness, and may one day be the cause of failure. He likes to think, and has enough imagination not to be bored when by himself and without books, especially since he has loved —. This confession is dated 1756, and is followed by a quaint statement worthy of literal translation: "I desire the same things for a long time, and I have observed, in examining myself, that since I have lived for three years among detestable people who have made me suffer horribly, I have become less vindictive. I do not know whether this is because my dose of hatred has been exhausted, or because it always seems to me that I have gone through worse experiences before. Should I ever be happy, I would wish everybody to be so too, so that nobody might envy my good fortune, 1760. . . ."

The above artless self-revelation of a young man who was still virtually a boy in years exhibits to us a cultured, chivalrous gentleman and polished man of the world, who, whilst taking himself seriously had nevertheless sufficient wit and humour to see his own weaknesses; it makes one understand the amiability and charm of his personality. What a contrast to the pompous, coarse, egotistical, self-seeking, and self-indulgent intriguers who would appear to have composed the exceptionally corrupt Court of Russia at that licentious period!

Let us for one moment glance at the circumstances of the unhappy Princess who so unreservedly gave him her love. The austere and virtuous critics of this frail young person are perfectly right to condemn her conduct. Arraigned before the stern court of the inflexible Mrs. Grundy, Catherine must plead guilty. But if she cannot hope for pardon, she should at least be allowed to cite the extenuating circumstances in mitigation of her offence;

and let us moreover search our hearts and ask ourselves whether it is meet for us to take her out and stone her.

Of her husband the least said the better; he was at this time the willing captive of the opulent charms of Elizabeth Vorontzoff, lady-in-waiting to his wife, whose fine and open countenance was scarred and pitted with small-pox. Whether Soltikoff had been her lover or not—for on this point the evidence can scarcely be regarded as convincing, and Catherine is therefore entitled to the benefit of the doubt—he had deserted her and had since been sent abroad. Her only child had been taken from her. The Empress regarded her with suspicion and jealousy. She was neglected, thrown entirely on her own resources, and nevertheless surrounded by spies. Yet this neglected, suspected, and closely observed Grand-Duchess was the consort of the heir apparent to the throne. In due course and at no very distant time, for Elizabeth was visibly breaking up, she would share her husband's crown. She was already the centre of masked intrigue. Bestoujeff-Ryounin, the one strong man in Russia at the time, unsuspecting and oblivious of his approaching fall, was anxious to find her a lover from amongst his creatures in order that he might through him rule her, who by her intelligence, wisdom, and capacity for affairs had already, young as she was, made it abundantly clear that when the Grand-Duke came to the throne the real ruler of Russia would be his consort.

And in this strange incongruous Court there was no one to act as mentor, no wise friend or counsellor to lean on, no noble example to follow. To say that the tone was low would be an absurd understatement. From the Empress, who gave a flagrant example of shamelessness and profligacy, downwards there was scarcely a virtuous person in the whole Court. The licentiousness of those times in Russia was so gross, so frank and unconcealed, that the respectable twentieth-century reader can scarcely conceive how such a state of society could have been possible, far less imagine the actual conditions.

Amidst all this corruption and debauchery, of which no attempt at concealment from her was made, Catherine remained a calm, unimpassioned, but rather disgusted spectator. She kept aloof. She entered as little into the curious distractions of her husband as she joined in the dissipation of the Court. Owing

to her exalted rank and station she had to take part in the various court functions, and she was passionately fond of dancing, but she spent the greater part of her time amongst her books, finding in summer healthy recreation in exercise and sport.

In the absence of convincing evidence to the contrary, slander there would always be amid such surroundings; we prefer to regard her as a sort of sleeping beauty in a wood, or rather jungle, where obscene creatures were crawling loathsomely about all unseen and unsuspected by her. That Peter had reason to believe in her virtue we have seen. And all at once there comes a Prince Charming to awaken her with a kiss!

Poniatovski's arrival in St. Petersburg synchronized with perhaps the saddest moments of Catherine's life. She had been made to feel that she had performed all that was expected of her, fulfilled her destiny, and, having produced an heir male to her husband, there was now no further use for her; her child was even taken from her. Alone, abandoned, and miserable as she was, the creatures of Bestoujeff-Ryoumin were always at her ear urging her to console herself, to taste a little happiness while she might,—to do, in short, as others did. But the Russian nobles by whom she was surrounded could not appeal to the cultured mind and fastidious taste of this Princess.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, like a visitant from another world, there appeared this charming, discreet, cultured, and accomplished Polish nobleman, to lay his virgin heart at her feet. That she was wrong to fall in love with him, that it was wrong to yield, who will deny? But that in the circumstances it was very natural and very human is equally incontrovertible.

The old saying about the course of true love not running smoothly was justified in this instance. Poniatovski as the nephew of the Czartoryskis hated the Saxon connection, and was most indiscreetly outspoken in his references to the Court of Dresden. He was little more than a year in St. Petersburg when he had to leave at the insistence of that Court. King Augustus would not tolerate his presence in the Russian capital, and Williams was reluctantly compelled to part company with him. Bilbassoff gives us a very charming picture of the Count's brief sojourn at St. Petersburg. Wherever Catherine went, he tells us, she met this dazzling Polish nobleman. He was the life of every party which

he graced with his presence; and very soon he had access to the private staircase of the Grand-Duchess, to which, as we have seen, he was introduced by Narishkin, who was putting temptation in her way at the instigation of Bestoujeff.

Bilbassoff also gives us a vivid picture of the political sympathies of Catherine, and clears her of the imputation of having been a party to the intrigues which culminated in the unpatriotic attitude of Field-Marshal Apraxin, who is supposed to have been bribed to refrain from marching on Frederick II of Prussia. In the Preface to the very interesting correspondence between Catherine and Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, published by the Imperial Russian Historical Society in 1909, an excellent review of Sir Charles Hanbury Williams's mission and activity is given. He had been charged by George II of England to conclude a treaty with Russia for the defence of Hanover against the aggression of Prussia, and he succeeded in effecting this very soon after his arrival. By this treaty Russia undertook to place an army of 55,000 men at the disposal of George II for this purpose in return for an annual subsidy of £500,000. This initial success turned poor Williams's head. He imagined himself possessed of inordinate influence over Bestoujeff and the grand-ducal Court, and to be all-powerful. This over-confidence was to cause him grave disappointment, and finally cost him his reason. His first loss of credit was due to the conclusion in 1756 of the Treaty of Westminster, whereby George II and Frederick II mutually guaranteed the integrity of each other's dominions. George II having become the ally of Frederick, the latter now found in Williams a zealous friend of Prussia. The King of Prussia entrusted him with secret missions and more especially with large sums of money for the purpose of winning the support of Bestoujeff, who, like Williams, regarded Catherine as the future real ruler of Russia, provided he could protect her against the machinations of a certain party in the country who were for reinstating the deposed Ivan, who was still living, and exiling Peter on the death of Elizabeth, an event which was but too obviously drawing near. While Bestoujeff accepted the Prussian gold he developed a jealousy of Williams, and in order to weaken the latter's influence over Catherine lent his weight to the intrigues which culminated in the expulsion of Poniatovski. Williams, who kept Catherine,

ever in difficulties, supplied with money, through the banker Baron Wolff, also the British Consul, did not lose the confidence of Catherine, and his correspondence with her exhibits to us in a new light this versatile woman. We here see her as a politician and a stateswoman with a remarkable knowledge of foreign affairs for one so young. We get glimpses in her letters of her long conversations on questions of state with Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, and discover how serious a part she was already playing in the country. There is nothing of the frivolous, self-indulgent voluptuary, such as her detractors would have us believe, and such as Elizabeth had ever been, in these clever letters.

The result of the entreaties of Catherine was to bring Poniatovski back, but events had moved rapidly in those few months, and when he arrived at St. Petersburg on 23rd December 1756 it was not as a private individual of no consequence but as the Minister Plenipotentiary of the Polish Republic.

This cultured nobleman, however, had not learned discretion by experience. As the Envoy of the King of Poland he nevertheless pressed the claims of the Czartoryskis and thus again endangered his position. His relations with Catherine were renewed, and here also the imprudent young man ran grave risks. In his *Memoirs* he says that he saw her frequently, and that even Narishkin's services were no longer required—that faithful Narishkin who used to mew, so it is stated in the *Memoirs* of Catherine, whenever he wanted to communicate with her. Poniatovski used to drive in a carriage or a sledge to the palace, and then proceed on foot towards the private stairs to which reference has been made. Here the sentry asked no questions. Sometimes the Grand-Duchess in male attire would come to meet her lover, enter his sledge, and drive with him to his residence. The Count tells us that the two were constantly on the point of being discovered, and gives many instances of their narrow escapes. At last an accident placed them beyond all subterfuges.

One night as Poniatovski, with more than usual audacity, had decided to pay Catherine a surprise visit and was driving in a hackney carriage to the country seat of the Grand-Duke Peter at Oranienbaum, he encountered Peter with his boon companions all drunk and uproarious. In that northern region the summer nights are never dark, and the grand-ducal party insisted

on stopping Poniatovski's cab. The occupant, disguised as a tailor, was, however, allowed to proceed unmolested, the only person who harboured suspicions of his *bona fides* being Elizabeth Vorontzoff, who kept twitting Peter as to what possible business a tailor could have in Oranienbaum at that time of night. The dull and sodden brains of Peter at length responded to her innuendoes; his suspicions were aroused. When Poniatovski a few hours later left the pavilion which Catherine was occupying, in order to regain the hackney carriage that was waiting for him, he was accosted by three horsemen with drawn sabres who seized him by the collar and dragged him into the presence of the Grand-Duke, who occupied another wing facing the sea, and asked him in very blunt and coarse terms what he had been doing to his wife, adding that if he confessed the truth all might be arranged, but that if he told lies he would have a bad time. Poniatovski denied all criminal conversation and was told that as he would not tell he would be kept in the palace until further orders. The adventurous Pole was placed in a room, at the door of which sentinels were posted, and was left alone with General Brockendorff, of Peter's suite. They remained together in complete silence for two hours, at the end of which they were joined by Prince Alexis Shouvaloff, whom Poniatovski calls the Grand Inquisitor. He was chief of the dreaded Secret Chancellerie of the Empire, and his appearance put Poniatovski into a state of considerable perturbation, implying as it did that the Empress had been apprised. In addition to the terror which his office inspired his face was horribly disfigured by convulsive nervous twitchings with which it was constantly distorted. This forbidding person had, moreover, a disconcerting impediment in his speech. Requested to state the reason for his presence, Poniatovski, instead of wasting breath in explanations, boldly took the bull by the horns and impressed upon Shouvaloff the necessity of getting him out of Oranienbaum with as little fuss as possible. Shouvaloff agreed, and gave him a conveyance, in which he drove to the outskirts of Peterhof, where he arrived at six in the morning. Disguised in his cloak he got home unobserved through the window of a neighbour, who viewed with astonishment the unexpected apparition of his friend. The next two days Poniatovski spent in the greatest uncertainty

until Catherine managed to send him a note, from which he gathered that she had taken steps to propitiate Peter's mistress. A day later the Count arrived to be present at a ball at Peterhof. While dancing a minuet with the Vorontzoff, Poniatovski took occasion to say to her that she could make some people very happy. She replied that this had been very nearly arranged, and told him to come to supper with Narishkin in the grand-ducal wing at one in the morning. Accompanied by Narishkin and a friend, Poniatovski kept his tryst. Here he was met by Elizabeth Vorontzoff, who asked him to wait a few minutes, as the Grand-Duke was smoking a pipe with some cronies who had first to be got rid of. Presently Poniatovski was admitted, and the Grand-Duke received him with great cordiality, reproaching him for not having at once made a clean breast of his recent escapade, thereby avoiding all subsequent fuss. With great presence of mind Poniatovski in reply complimented Peter on the excellent efficiency of his military dispositions and the vigilance of his sentries. Thereupon the delighted Peter insisted on dragging his wife out of bed, and the happy party did not separate until four in the morning. This unconventional meeting was the precursor of numerous little supper-parties, composed of the Grand-Duke, his wife, his mistress, and Poniatovski, which took place in Catherine's apartment. After supper Peter and Elizabeth Vorontzoff would withdraw, the former saying: "Well, children, I think you do not require my company any longer," and the two lovers would be left together. Truly a strange *ménage*, but not less extraordinary than that of the Empress Elizabeth.

In January 1758 Catherine gave birth to a daughter, of whom Poniatovski is generally believed to be the father. The child was christened Anne, and the Empress was desirous of having Louis XV for its sponsor; but that pious and most Catholic monarch instructed his Envoy, L'Hôpital, to explain that he could not countenance the baptizing of a human soul into the Greek faith. This daughter was not destined to attain maturity, but died in her infancy.

While Poniatovski and Catherine were, with the consent of Peter, basking in each other's smiles, the Apraxin incident burst like a storm-cloud over the unsuspecting heads of the

happy pair. The Empress had just recovered from one of those fits which were the precursors of her dissolution and had been made aware of the existence of a correspondence, innocent enough in itself, between Apraxin and Catherine, and became furious, for she had prohibited the interchange of private letters between Catherine and others. In her jealous rage her worst suspicions were aroused, and the next intelligence to reach Catherine was the overwhelming news of the arrest of Bestoujeff-Ryoumin himself. This astute and tortuous statesman had, it appears, conceived a scheme for placing the infant Paul on the Russian throne, under the regency of Catherine, in the event of Elizabeth's death, and of compelling Peter to renounce his right of succession. Catherine was no party to this plot, which indeed had emanated solely from the crafty brain of the Chancellor for the only purpose of making himself the dominant factor in the State, where Catherine would be compelled to play but an insignificant and subordinate rôle; but the scheme had been explained to her and she had wisely refrained from comment. Fortunately for her Bestoujeff had had time to burn his papers before he was thrown into prison and deprived of all his offices. He was accused of *lèse-majesté*, and a commission was appointed to examine him, while Poniatovski was expelled the country and Catherine herself fell into disgrace. Bestoujeff was exiled in 1759, and the Grand-Duke now denounced his wife.

CHAPTER IX

DEATH OF ELIZABETH

THE fall of Bestoujeff has been described as the triumph of the French party. France was in truth but a half-hearted ally to Russia. She had indeed put forth all her arts to obtain the accession of that Power to the Treaty of Versailles ; but her main object had been Austria, and the friendship of Russia had only been valued in proportion to the danger which would have resulted from her enmity. Both Austria and France were jealously watchful of Russia's aggrandizement, and were equally determined that she should not acquire a footing in the German Empire by retaining the province of Prussia, which Elizabeth regarded as her share of the spoils of war. The old jealousy of Russia was still strong in French counsels, and all through the war, though the French Government were sometimes in fear lest Russia should withdraw her forces when they were most needed, they were much more inclined to be apprehensive of her becoming too successful.

France was beginning to weary of the war in which she had suffered so severely, and was desirous of Russian mediation in the negotiations for peace. She was jealous of the influence of England and of the advantages which that country enjoyed in her Russian trade, and yet was unwilling to purchase Elizabeth's friendship by yielding to her in the matter of Prussia. While she was anxious for the alliance of Russia, her traditional policy in relation to Sweden, Turkey, and Poland was still a perpetual barrier to any sincere and genuine friendship. The main object of French diplomacy in Northern Europe was to keep Russia inactive and removed as far as possible from European affairs.

Although the aim of France was to separate the Grand-Duke from a wife whose influence was believed to be so powerfully in

favour of the enemies of that country, the Duc de Choiseul, now that the health of Elizabeth was visibly failing, awoke to the necessity of gaining the Grand-Duchess. With this object he could devise no better plan than the finding of a substitute in her affections for the banished Poniatovski. M. de Breteuil was for this purpose dispatched to St. Petersburg in the April of 1760 to supplement and eventually to succeed the Marquis de l'Hôpital. The Baron de Breteuil was twenty-seven years of age, a gallant colonel of dragoons and very handsome. His wife was ordered to remain behind, but courageously followed him in the second year of his embassy; indeed, the charms of the young Frenchman had no success with the future Empress, who was already embarked on a very different voyage of amorous discovery.

In the spring of 1759 there appeared in St. Petersburg a Prussian prisoner of war, by name Count Schwerin, aide-de-camp to the King of Prussia, who had been taken at the battle of Zorndorf on the 12th August 1758, and had been kept at Koenigsberg before being dispatched to the capital. There, as well as in St. Petersburg, he was treated more like a distinguished visitor than a prisoner, and was attended by, rather than placed under the surveillance of, two Russian subalterns, named respectively Orloff and Zinovieff.

Count Schwerin was received by the Empress and was made much of by the Grand-Duke Peter, who even went so far as to tell him that he would regard it as an honour if he were allowed to serve under the King of Prussia.

On the occasions when Count Schwerin visited the court he was usually accompanied by his escort, Lieutenant Orloff.

Gregory Orloff was indisputably the most handsome, and probably the most feather-brained, of five brothers. To judge by contemporary portraits and the testimony of eye-witnesses, Orloff was incomparably better looking than Poniatovski. He was tall, well-made; as brave as his brother Alexis was fool-hardy; as powerful as he, Gregory Orloff had excited the admiration of his men by his dauntless courage at the battle of Zorndorf.

Thrice wounded, he refused to retire from action, but seemed to challenge fate to do its worse; and, as is so frequently the

case in such circumstances, his fate befriended him. In St. Petersburg he lived with his brothers, officers of the guards, shared their dissipations, made love to the beauties of the capital, and became the gossip of the town for his high play and gallantries. Even his rivals admitted that to see him was to fall in love with him. He was almost insolent in the boldness of his advances, which added to his charm in the eyes of the ladies. In 1759 Gregory Orloff was transferred to the artillery, and in 1760 he filled the somewhat prominent position of aide-de-camp to the Master-General of Ordnance, for the latter was at the time Count Shouvaloff, a cousin of the all-powerful favourite. The aide-de-camp soon distinguished himself by winning the affections of Helen Kurakin, his chief's mistress, and was within an ace of accomplishing his own downfall, from which he was only saved by the opportune death of Shouvaloff. The Kurakin incident, rich in picturesque episode, in which the romantic resourcefulness of its hero found full play, was soon the talk of the town, and even came to the ears of Catherine. At that time adventures of this nature, instead of injuring a reputation, were, on the contrary, calculated to advance a man's career. People little knew that Orloff's boldness in love, like his courage in war, owed their origin alike to the desperate condition of his finances, for he was head over ears in debt, entirely without means, and had nothing to lose. Whilst the cause of his recklessness was not generally known, his apparent indifference to fate made him universally interesting. He certainly excited the interest of Catherine.

That princess was at the time in a desperate condition. In disgrace with an Empress who was dying by inches, she had been practically abandoned by her besotted husband, who openly talked of divorcing her in order that he might marry Elizabeth Vorontzoff, whose ample proportions had captured his vagrant fancy in spite of the plainness of her face.

For Catherine, Orloff appeared on the horizon in the very nick of time. He was brave and resourceful and could be depended on; no dangers had any terrors for him, confidence could be reposed in him. He was an officer and could be trusted as such to be a man of honour. At that time all the moral forces of the country, its entire political life, were concentrated in the

army, and more especially in the guards, which contained the flower of the Russian nobility. Catherine felt instinctively that a man of the stamp of Orloff was indispensable to her for the realization of her projects. For she was a resourceful woman who, as we have seen, had come from a bold and warlike stock, and now that she recognized her desperate condition, her dauntless martial spirit was awakened, and she was determined to fight her enemies and, if possible, overthrow them.

Bilbassoff has given us a lifelike and vivid picture of Catherine at this critical period in her career. Shortly after her arrival in Russia Catherine's attitude was one of childlike ingenuousness and sincerity. Her one desire was to offer an unconditional obedience to the Empress and to behave to the Grand-Duke in perfect consonance with the respect and duty which a good wife owes her husband. But the longer she lived in Russia the more she experienced the difficulties, not to say the impossibility, of the task she had set herself. When she became the wife of the Grand-Duke she conscientiously set about fulfilling her obligations, but encountered obstacles in the very quarter where she least expected to find them. She very early discovered that she could not share the opinions and views, the pursuits and habits of her husband. She could not bring herself to approve the conduct of either the Empress or the Grand-Duke. Elizabeth no longer exhibited the partiality which she had formerly manifested for her. After the birth of Paul she treated her with indifference, but after the Apraxin affair and the disgrace of Bestoujeff-Ryoumin she completely turned against her, although she was compelled to admit to herself that Catherine was less to blame than her enemies represented. In her new surroundings, far from her relations and the friends of her youth, Catherine felt herself isolated and estranged. The only man who had professed friendship to her was the enemy of her mother, had caused that mother to be sent out of the country, and was now himself in exile. The Vorontzoffs and Shouvaloffs, now all-powerful, were his enemies, and although they were not disposed to thwart every wish of Catherine's, they scarcely comprehended her position and the difficulties that surrounded her, more especially the dangers which threatened her in the future. When, in course of time, the Grand-Duke

would ascend the throne, what course was she to adopt? Was she to do all she could to curry favour with him, humour him, and be dependent on, and at the mercy of, his caprice, or was she to take measures to protect herself?

This idea of self-protection, of defence, had taken possession of her some time before she met Orloff. Her husband was faithless and openly talked of divorcing her; her lover had been taken away from her. It must be admitted that her position was deserving of pity, even though her conduct savoured of frailty rather than virtue. Bilbassoff would have us believe that Catherine at first encouraged Orloff because she thought she saw in him a means of salvation, but in her letters to Poniatovski she writes of Orloff's following her everywhere and committing a thousand follies, whereby he caused his passion for Catherine to become public property. There can be little doubt that this swashbuckling hero appealed to her imagination. Handsome and heroic, in the flower of his youth,—he was but twenty-five,—Orloff was the type of the *beau sabreur* with whom the young ladies of every clime and country have from time immemorial fallen in love and run away. Catherine, from whose arms the accomplished Poniatovski had been but recently so ruthlessly torn, was, moreover, in need of consolation. She was alone, disconsolate, and friendless, and all at once there burst into her life the tempestuous apparition of this true son of Mars, for whom all the ladies of St. Petersburg were languishing, and who had eyes and ears for no one but her, who followed her about, pursued her with his bold and flattering admiration, and openly spurned the more facile conquests of less exalted persons. There was, of course, an element of danger in this attitude, and his contemptuous disregard of the consequences his ambitious passion might entail could not fail to appeal to the susceptibility and vanity of the very human and very feminine object of his adoration.

No doubt she felt there was a certain similarity in their positions. The daring soldier of fortune, who had nothing to lose, but was risking his career and his life in his reckless infatuation, was scarcely more adventurously situated than she who was seated isolated and friendless on the footsteps of a throne, to prevent her from ascending which the whole world

seemed to be conspiring. What her fate might be if the designs of her enemies, among whom she included her husband, were to succeed she must often have trembled to think. But she was a soldier's daughter and cast in an heroic mould; she was therefore more intent on combating her opponents with all the weapons which a frail, weak woman has at her command than on contemplating her possible fate in the event of disaster and defeat.

The Orloffs were popular with their brother-officers. They drank and gambled with them, among whom Gregory was especially liked as a true comrade, a trusty friend, and a thoroughly good fellow from every manly, and perhaps not over-lofty, point of view. These young men were not precisely squeamish and admired him as much for his splendid vices as for his genial good qualities. He certainly seemed designated by fate to be Catherine's abetter, aid, and accomplice. As we have seen, he had frequent access to the Court, and was able to tell his boon companions how Peter thought on military matters, how little sympathy he had with the guards, to whose co-operation Elizabeth owed her crown, and whom she had in consequence so consistently pampered and spoilt. Gregory Orloff could further tell them how much their future Emperor loved the Prussians, with whom the country was at war, and how conspicuously he lacked anything resembling patriotism, for Peter despised the nation he was to be called upon to rule over, and took no pains to conceal his contempt.

In short, Catherine was following in the footsteps of Elizabeth, who had owed her ascent of the throne to her guards.

While Orloff and his brothers were creating a public opinion and a following for Catherine among the troops, that very clear-headed princess was making friends elsewhere. She required statesmen as well as soldiers if she was to succeed in her plans, which she was now rapidly maturing, so true is it that necessity is the mother of invention.

The son of Catherine, who, as we have seen, was not believed to be the son of Peter, the Grand-Duke Paul, had been given for tutor a certain Nikita Panin, the creature of Bestoujeff. Panin had received what must be described as an excellent education for his time; he had been selected by Bestoujeff, and

was a faithful disciple of his diplomatic school, hating France and looking on Austria as his country's natural friend and ally. As a young man of about twenty-nine he had been regarded with favour by the kindly and amorous Elizabeth, but the slothfulness of his disposition had saved him from complications. The story goes that on one occasion he had been commanded to await his Empress's behests outside her bathroom, and that when that august lady had need of his services and sent for him, he was found in such profound slumber that he could be awakened with difficulty. He consequently incurred the displeasure of Her Majesty and was dispatched in disgrace as ambassador to Stockholm, so runs the legend, reproduced by Waliszewski. Bilbassoff, however, suggests that his ambassadorial appointment was probably due as much to the jealousy of his rivals in the Empress's favour, as to his own indolence. When, at the age of forty-two, he was recalled to undertake the mentorship of the Grand-Duke Paul, he had ceased to be redoubtable, he was already obese and deliberate in his movements. His indolent tastes, while they had not tended to raise his moral tone, had made him averse to the assiduous ardours of amorous intrigue, and he had developed into a gross, middle-aged debauchee, in whose pleasures pursuit and sentiment played no part.

In spite of his defects Panin possessed an extraordinarily keen intellect, his knowledge of foreign affairs was masterly, and his admiration for the wisdom, common sense, and political genius of Catherine was boundless. He very soon recognized that Peter could not possibly develop into a satisfactory ruler of the Russian Empire, and the insulting terms in which the latter was in the habit of addressing everybody, Panin not excepted, alienated any sympathy he may possibly have had for him at an earlier date.

While Catherine required the aid of the mature brain and ripe experience of an accomplished diplomatist, she also needed an enthusiast to inspire her supporters with that intoxicating faith in her ability and character, and to surround her with that glamour of romance and interest which are indispensable to genuine popularity. With the multitude an appeal to the imagination is always more successful than purely logical

considerations. That was the age of women; and it was a woman who proved Catherine's most valuable and most powerful ally.

Orloff has been described as a splendid animal. He was kindly, generous, spirited, unselfish, a really fine fellow, his vices arising more from absence of principles than from depravity. Speaking colloquially, in the language of the man in the street, Orloff was "not a bad sort," indeed his comrades and boon companions probably regarded him as a "regular good fellow." Catherine, from the day she fell in love with him to the time when she was forced to part with him, loved him with an infatuation and a blindness to his faults quite pathetic and even beautiful. Hers was a noble, heroic devotion, which refused to see faults or blemishes in its object. But for all that Orloff, in spite of his splendid qualities, his grand features, was more like a knight of the Middle Ages, on a prancing, fiery steed, than a scheming, tricky, eighteenth-century courtier. He was as straightforward, frank, robust, as he was unintellectual.

In Princess Dashkoff, Catherine was singularly fortunate in finding the poetess of the movement. Princess Dashkoff was indeed a woman of extraordinary mental gifts and intellectual vigour; a stimulating and vivifying force, which seemed to impart animation and enthusiasm by magic, her ardour was not merely contagious, it was epidemic. The *Mémoires* of this remarkable person offer some of the most fascinating reading to be found in literature, for they give us a sight, as it were a reflection in a mirror, of an ardent soul, without complications or ignoble baseness; even her faults are grand and on an heroic scale; there is nothing petty, insincere, or sordid in her magnificent tempestuous nature.

Princess Catherine Dashkoff, who was a sister of Elizabeth Vorontzoff, the plain but fat and complacent mistress of the Grand-Duke Peter, was born in 1744 in St. Petersburg. Her mother, who died when this daughter was but in her second year, had been the friend and supporter of the Empress Elizabeth when the latter was still but a Grand-Duchess, with little prospect of ever ascending the throne. It has been stated that this devoted friend aided her gracious mistress not only with money, but by the exercise of the fascinations of her sex.

Little Catherine was brought up in the country by her maternal grandmother and saw nothing of her elder sisters. Her father was a young and handsome *viveur*, who could spare no time from his pleasures to watch over the education of his children. It was his eldest brother, the Chancellor, who insisted on having his little niece brought up to the capital when she was barely four, and instructed in a manner befitting her social position. She was taught to speak four languages, amongst which Russian did not apparently figure, and knew English and French particularly well. She drew and danced, had most elegant manners, and was sufficiently patriotic to ask to be allowed to study Russian, a request which was graciously granted. The Princess complains, however, that in spite of her teachers and her reputation of being a well-educated girl, nothing was done to train the hearts and minds of these motherless children, whose aunt was quite unequal to the task, being a strange mixture of overbearing pride and sensitive kindness of heart.

From her earliest childhood, so the Princess tells us in her *Mémoires*, she yearned for the affections of those about her, and endeavoured to excite their interest. At the age of thirteen she contracted the measles, for which offence she was exiled to a village some twelve miles off, because the Empress had issued an *ookaz* prohibiting from all intercourse with the Court those families in which had broken out such contagious diseases as small-pox, scarlatina, measles, etc., in order to keep the little Grand-Duke Paul free from these complaints.

In the custody of a German lady and a major's widow the child of thirteen, whose eyes had been attacked by the disease, spent her lonely days in brooding, and became, as she avers, a reformed character. As soon as her sight was restored to her she took to reading the serious authors who were then in vogue, Bayle, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Boileau. Thus the two Catherine's were unconsciously treading intellectual paths which were later to bring them more closely together. Shouvaloff, the favourite of the Empress, hearing of the studious tastes of the precocious child, and being himself addicted to foreign literature, kept her supplied with the latest books, so that when she got married she possessed a library of no less than nine hundred

volumes. In that year she crowned her bibliographical edifice by purchasing a copy of the famous *Encyclopédie*. Her meeting with her future husband was as romantic as the rest of her life. One summer evening, after having supped with a Mme Samarin, who was indisposed, she decided to walk home, the weather being bright, as it so often is at that time of the year in those northern latitudes. Accompanied by Mme Samarin's sister she started on her somewhat unconventional return journey, when there suddenly loomed out of a by-street a veritable giant, who turned out to be Prince Dashkoff, a friend of her companion's. He escorted the two ladies home. The perfect courtesy of his manners, coupled with a certain reserve and shyness, fascinated the impressionable girl, who later became his wife. The course of true love did not at first run smoothly, but the Empress Elizabeth, who was also her godmother, played the part of the good fairy. The Prince appears to have been an indulgent, tender, and considerate husband, and the Princess gives us some charming instances of his devotion.

The *Mémoires* of Princess Dashkoff have been generally discredited, seeing that this vivacious friend of Catherine's is rather inclined to turn the limelight on herself and to place the future Empress, who was very much her senior in years, and had had considerably more experience of the world, in a secondary place if not entirely in the shade. Indeed, according to her own account, the intrepid little Princess would appear to have been the preserver and rescuer of Catherine and the prime mover in the overthrow of Peter. Be this as it may, there is at least no doubt that she was her close friend and principal aider and abetter.

In the autumn of 1758 the two Catherines first met at a party given by Count Vorontzoff, whose niece was then but fifteen years old. In that gay and dissipated Court she was, we are led to believe, the only one who gave her mind to serious thought, and found time for books and study amongst the frivolity by which she was surrounded. This love of reading formed a bond of union between the young debutante and the mature matron. They had something in common. After her marriage, in the following year, Princess Dashkoff had to live for some time in Moscow, and it was not until 1761 that she returned to St. Peters-

burg with her husband. At that time the Empress was living at Peterhof, and the Grand-Duchess at Oranienbaum, whilst Princess Dashkoff occupied the villa of her uncle situated half-way between these two places. The Grand-Duchess was permitted by the Empress to visit her son once a week, and on her return journey she generally stopped at the Villa Vorontzoff and carried off Princess Dashkoff to Oranienbaum to spend the evening with her.

When the Court returned to town these fitful interviews terminated, but a few days before the death of the Empress, the Princess, who was barely seventeen, having heard strange rumours, appeared one night at the bedside of the Grand-Duchess and declared to her how much she was disturbed by the storm-clouds which she could see gathering round her friend's head, and adjured her to confide in her, assuring her that she was worthy of her trust. "Tell me your plan!" she cried. "What do you intend to do for your safety? The Empress has but a few days, perhaps only a few hours to live. If I can be of service to you, command me, make use of me!"

But Catherine had no plan, she was quite unprepared for the storm which was gathering. She had, however, common sense and the nimble and ready wit of a remarkably clever woman. She was in her thirty-third year, and the seventeen years she had spent in Russia had not been thrown away on her. She had made a study of the political situation, and was well aware what might be expected to be the fate of the country if her husband came to the throne.

The Empress Elizabeth was dying; her last stroke had completely shaken her. She was abandoning her former wildly dissipated life, but while she became more austere did not apparently grow less self-indulgent. Already in December 1757 L'Hôpital reported: "The Empress has no regular hours. She sups at midnight and goes to bed at four in the morning. She eats much, and often has long spells of very strict fasting. Recently she has developed a piety so great and so extraordinary as to partake more of idolatry than of religion." A year later, in the January of 1759, he wrote: "The Empress has become strangely superstitious. She remains for whole hours before an ikon, for which she professes great devotion. She speaks to

it. She consults it. She goes to the Opera at eleven, has supper at one, and goes to bed at five."

Details of the private life of the Empress Elizabeth were of palpitating interest to the whole of Europe; for everybody knew that her end was approaching, and that a change of reign was fraught with momentous consequences to the entire community of nations. That Peter would prove at least the passive friend if not the active ally of Frederick of Prussia was generally expected, but nowhere was his accession looked upon with greater apprehension than in Copenhagen, except perhaps in St. Petersburg, especially in the entourage of the Grand-Duchess.

Latterly Elizabeth had become completely reconciled to Catherine, and had grown more and more disgusted with her nephew, whose Prussian predilections annoyed her more particularly. Indeed Breteuil reports an interesting conversation which he had at the commencement of 1761 with the Chancellor, Count Vorontzoff, from which it would appear that while the Empress had no intention of disinheriting her nephew, Peter, in favour of his son Paul, as had been rumoured, Vorontzoff nevertheless admitted that she detested Peter, who had given her much cause for uneasiness. Breteuil then reports that he told Vorontzoff that Osten, the Danish Minister and confidant of Catherine, had told him that Catherine had declared she wished the succession to devolve on her son Paul, and that she would prefer to be the Emperor's mother rather than his wife, and that she believed she would have more authority and influence as the former. To this Vorontzoff is alleged to have replied that the Grand-Duchess was quite capable of inspiring the Empress with the necessary courage for carrying out such a plan.

Peter was indeed fond of talking about how he intended to place himself at the head of an army and march against Denmark in order to recapture his beloved Holstein, which little duchy he placed before Russia, for he had never studied or cared to study the interests of that Empire. His Prussian uniforms and his outspoken contempt for the country of his adoption had, moreover, made him many enemies.

It was at about this time that Keith was appointed British Envoy. His arrival was opportune, for he pursued the policy of Hanbury Williams, and was always willing and ready to lend

Catherine money, in the hope, we are told, of gaining influence and power on a change of reign.

Amidst all these speculations, rumours, plots, schemes, and intrigues the worn-out Empress Elizabeth died at about three in the afternoon of Tuesday, the 25th December 1761, having taken leave on the previous day of her nephew and niece.

CHAPTER X

REIGN OF PETER III

AT the moment of Elizabeth's death Peter III and his consort stood at her bedside. As soon as the doctors—there were four of that profession in attendance—pronounced life to be extinct the doors of the ante-chamber were thrown open, and the members of the Senate, the higher office-bearers of the State, and the functionaries of the Court entered. All were deeply moved, and there was no one there who did not weep. The Emperor retired; Catherine had arranged with him that she would remain in the death-chamber while he repaired to the palace chapel. She had given such clear and detailed instructions, that, within two hours of Elizabeth's death, the public could be admitted to the apartment in which the remains were placed. Peter III then summoned her to the church, where she attended divine service, and witnessed, as an ordinary spectator, all those present take the oath of allegiance to the new Emperor.

On the 26th December the representatives of foreign Governments were received in the palace; and offered their congratulations on the accession. The reception was simple and void of ceremony. Their Majesties arrived from their apartments together and were most gracious to all, inviting them to dinner for the same day. There were one hundred covers for the banquet, and places were allocated by lot, those of the Emperor and Empress not excepted. Breteuil thought the Empress looked particularly sad and dejected, and reported that it was quite apparent that she would be entirely without importance, whilst Peter was ostentatiously attentive to the Countess Vorontzoff. He regarded the position of Catherine as terrible; already she was being treated with undisguised contempt. She

was bearing with impatience, he says, the Emperor's treatment of her and the insolent behaviour of his mistress ; and concludes by expressing his inability to imagine that the Empress, whose courage and indomitable spirit were well known to him, would not sooner or later have recourse to some extreme measure. " I know that she has friends who are trying to calm her, but who are ready to do anything for her that she may ask."

There was at least good official ground for Catherine's dejection. In the manifesto announcing the accession of Peter III which appeared on that day, no mention was made of either the Empress or the heir apparent, Paul. Moreover, the oath of allegiance was drawn up in the following terms : " I swear to be a loyal subject to His Imperial Majesty . . . and his successor as elected at His Imperial and Autocratic Majesty's pleasure." However, on the next day, the 27th, the Empress Catherine and the Cæsarevitch and heir apparent, the Grand-Duke Paul, were officially included in the prayers of all the churches.

During the whole period of Peter III's reign, Catherine wore mourning and led a retired life, appearing but rarely at her consort's drinking bouts. She took no part in the affairs of the State, and her attitude of almost ostentatious aloofness was interpreted by astute foreign observers as auguring no good for Peter. The Austrian Minister suspected that under a calm exterior she was probably concealing some secret enterprise. Even Louis XV wrote to Breteuil to say that the general behaviour of Peter III and the patience simulated by the Empress indicated that the former would not occupy the throne for long. But those whom the gods wish to destroy they deprive of reason, and neither Peter III nor his self-satisfied Holstein favourites had the least inkling that anything was wrong.

It seems, however, that in the early days, just after Elizabeth's death, Catherine, on whose advice, intelligence, and common sense Peter had been accustomed to lean, used to frequent her husband's study in the morning, but that she very soon abandoned the practice. Her position was rendered difficult indeed. Whatever their private relations may have been, Peter seems to have neglected no opportunity of humiliating his consort in public ; and he even deliberately insulted her at an official banquet. This was all the more hard to bear seeing that Catherine was in an

interesting condition at the time, as a result of her relations with Orloff. But Catherine knew how to turn her feminine weakness to advantage. Peter, on the other hand, was apparently totally incapable of understanding the circumstances in which he was placed or the dangers he was foolishly creating.

As soon as he found himself an absolute monarch he gave full vent to his slightest caprices. He regarded as humiliating the retention of advisers, and acted entirely on his own uncontrolled impulses. Intolerant of opposition, he would listen to no arguments, but with the obstinacy of conceit refused to see the obstacles in the way of his desires. In his attempts to court popularity with the people he did not reflect that the nobles and clergy, whom he insulted, had more power and influence than their untutored serfs, who were still plunged in Cimmerian darkness and knew little and cared less about general ideas. By his reduction of the salt tax he made no friends to compensate him for the enemies his eccentricities and lack of Russian sympathies had created.

While Catherine was scrupulously observing the ordinances of the Church, Peter, for instance, was openly and actively defying them.

On the eve of Elizabeth's funeral Baron Breteuil wrote that Catherine was captivating the hearts of the Russian people, more especially by her close observance of the religious rites of the Greek Church with regard to the honours due to the dead. Moreover, she was careful in observing all saints' days and holidays, and in keeping strict fast whenever this was prescribed. The Emperor, on the other hand, received the foreign envoys and the nobility in the palace-chapel during divine service, walking about and conversing whilst the priests were saying Mass, and generally behaving with nonchalance as though he were in his private apartments; the Empress meantime devoutly kneeling and praying. As soon as the congregation went down on their knees Peter III burst into a loud peal of derisive laughter and noisily left the church. For the official head of the Orthodox Faith to behave in such a fashion was as scandalous as it was foolish. But worse was to follow. Peter expressed his autocratic desire to have all sacred pictures, with the exception of those of the Saviour and the Holy Virgin, removed from the churches

throughout the land, and the priesthood, who dressed then, as they do now, in imitation of the portraits of the Saviour, to have their beards shaved off and to exchange their cassocks for the black coats of Lutheran pastors. He even planned the building of a Protestant chapel within the precincts of the palace. The Russians are not an intolerant race, but they are very retentive of their own religious customs and observances. The Emperor's conduct created a feeling of indignation throughout the empire, which found expression in a revolutionary movement, and investigation established the fact that throughout the length and breadth of Russia the clergy were stirring up the people to rebellion. When Peter later promulgated his famous ukaz disendowing the monasteries and confiscating Church lands, the clergy in a body boldly and formally protested. The Metropolitan Arsenius addressed a petition, "most piteous and tearful, yet most pointed and full of argument," which was read to Peter III at a full Court in the presence of all his generals and nobles, and at which the Emperor flew into a passion. He caused the venerable Metropolitan to be confined in his cell and placed under observation as though he were a lunatic.

Not content with offending the clergy, and thus putting the masses against him, Peter turned his attention to the army, and proceeded to create disaffection amongst them. He disbanded the corps of life guards, and gave his Holstein Guards precedence over the rest of the troops. Just as he had desired the Greek clergy to don the garments of Protestantism, he endeavoured to transform the Russian army into the similitude of the Prussian. The comfortable loose-fitting uniforms of the Russian had to give way to the tight-fitting and irksome dress of the Prussian soldier. He even altered the names of the regiments, which instead of being called after towns henceforth bore the names of their commanders. Further, by introducing the iron Prussian discipline, with all its cruel severities, and compelling all troops to drill in the open every day without regard to the weather, he created indignation throughout the service, but more especially in the guards. As Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief he appointed the unpopular Prince George of Holstein, whom he also made Colonel of the Horse Guards, a regiment of which the Sovereign had hitherto always held the command. But what

caused most discontent was Peter's abject adoration of Frederick the Great of Prussia—a monarch against whom Russia had been fighting for the last five years, and with whom she was still officially at war—and his preparation for a war against Denmark. Officers resigned their commissions by the hundred, and the regiments of guards destined for the unpopular Danish campaign loudly protested.

During the first four months of the reign of Peter III his consort behaved with great circumspection and prudence. She rarely ventured out of her private apartments, and graced with her presence as little as possible the banquets and bacchanalia to which her consort was so partial. When the Court moved to the Winter Palace on the 6th April 1762 the Empress was given apartments at the extreme end of the new building, whilst the Princess Elizabeth Vorontzoff was accommodated in the entresol and close to the Emperor's private rooms at the opposite end. This suited Catherine admirably. In a letter, dated 2nd April 1781, to her son, Prince Alexis Grigorevitch Bobrinsky, she writes: "It is within my knowledge that your mother, being oppressed by various malignant enemies, and being desirous, in the circumstances then obtaining, to save herself and her eldest son, found herself compelled to conceal your birth, which took place on the 11th April 1762." These lines give a sufficient indication of the very awkward position in which Catherine was placed and the straits to which she must have been put. But she rapidly regained her strength, and resumed her expectant attitude. On the 21st April she received congratulations on her birthday, which was celebrated with great pomp, and she gave an audience to the Austrian Envoy, Count Mercy d'Argenteau, replying to his address in an appropriate speech emphasizing her friendly disposition towards Austria. This was the first political speech of the Empress and attracted considerable public attention, differing so widely as it did from the utterances and conduct of her consort.

While the Emperor was making the necessary preparations for the Danish campaign a rumour was put about that he intended to have his Empress locked up in a convent.

On the 4th June the ratification of the treaty of peace with Prussia was solemnized, the official rejoicings, amidst the general indignation of the people, extending over three days. On that

day a banquet was given at which covers for four hundred persons were laid. The Empress sat in her usual place, at the centre of the table, whilst the Emperor sat at the head with the Prussian Envoy, Baron von der Goltz, by his side. When Peter III proposed the health of the Imperial family, Catherine drank the toast sitting. Peter, who was very excited and probably drunk, sent round his aide-de-camp to inquire why she did not rise to drink the toast, like the rest. Catherine sent word that as there were present three members of the Imperial family, the Emperor, herself, and their son, she did not think it right for her to drink her own health standing. Peter was furious, and instructed his aide-de-camp to inform her that she must be a fool not to know that their two uncles, Holstein Princes, were also members of the Imperial family. In his excitement and rage, and lest his message might have been softened in the transmission, he shouted across the table at his wife, for all to hear, and publicly called her a fool. At such an insult the tears started to Catherine's eyes, but being anxious to avoid a scene, she begged Count Stroganoff to amuse her with his inexhaustible fund of drolleries. He succeeded so well that Peter, regarding their laughter as defiance of his authority, ordered Stroganoff to be escorted to his country-house and Catherine to be placed under arrest. Thanks to the intercession of Prince George this latter measure was not, however, carried out.

It is said that Peter had been drinking burgundy, champagne, and porter, or some kind of British beer. His disgraceful public behaviour to Catherine excited the indignation of her friends, who urged upon her to imitate the example of the Empress Elizabeth, place herself at the head of the guards, who were devoted to her, and possess herself of the person of her husband.

Meanwhile, after further banquets, suppers, and fireworks, Peter departed on the 12th June to Oranienbaum, whilst Catherine remained alone in St. Petersburg with her son. There was electricity in the air, and everybody seemed to be expecting something extraordinary. The foreign envoys were apparently convinced that mischief was brewing, and even the British Envoy, Keith, is reported to have said to Countess Bruce: "Your Emperor must be demented; no one but a madman could possibly behave as he does."

The principal jeweller of St. Petersburg was so exercised in his mind that he asked the Countess Vorontzoff, wife of the Chancellor, for advice, and was told by her that she had reason to feel even more concerned than he, and advised him to behave with great circumspection in the present critical state of affairs.

On the 17th June, Catherine took leave of her son Paul, who remained under the care of Panin, and proceeded to Peterhof, where she remained in strict seclusion. On Wednesday the 19th June she went to Oranienbaum to attend a concert, at which Peter played the fiddle, and to witness some private theatricals. She was in deep mourning, appeared very depressed, and sat through the performance without a laugh or a smile. She returned to Peterhof that same night and never again set eyes on her lord and master.

Peter III, blind to all around him, and deaf to the ominous rumblings of discontent and unrest in St. Petersburg, continued to enjoy himself at Oranienbaum in the company of his beloved Countess Elizabeth Vorontzoff and flatterers and favourites. The original intention had been to start on the unpopular Danish campaign in mid-June, but one festival succeeded another. It was finally decided to celebrate at Oranienbaum the accession to the throne on the 29th, the day of SS. Peter and Paul. On the day before, Peter took it into his head to be present at a big banquet at Montplaisir and then to pay his wife a surprise visit at Peterhof, and receive loyal congratulations at supper. But on his arrival at Peterhof he found the palace unoccupied. Catherine had left ! What had happened ?

On the 5th June the Senate had informed the Emperor that the Imperial revenue was insufficient for the expenditure, and that there was a large deficit accounted for largely by supplies to the army abroad. The College for Foreign Affairs reported that the Crimean Khan was preparing to invade Russia. From the interior news of rebellion and insubordination among the peasantry was being received, whilst it was reported that the local military forces were inadequate to cope with the situation. Meanwhile the Government Departments had but one preoccupation, namely, the war with Denmark for the Duchy of Holstein. The people in the streets of St. Petersburg, and especially the guardsmen, openly abused the Emperor. Even Count

Vorontzoff, the Chancellor of the Empire, was constrained to admit that "the Emperor was hated by the people."

Catherine, in whose mind the public insult offered her at the recent banquet was still rankling, was well aware of all this. She had consultations with Panin, Princess Dashkoff, and Gregory and Alexis Orloff.

Panin, who had been grossly insulted by him, hated the Emperor personally. He was in favour of proclaiming Paul Emperor, with Catherine as Regent, and of throwing Peter III into prison. He proposed seizing the person of Peter on the occasion of his inspection of the guards at St. Petersburg before their departure to the theatre of war. There can be no doubt that this would have been an opportune moment. In any case, it was decided to keep the Grand-Duke Paul in St. Petersburg, and not to let him accompany his mother to Peterhof, where he could easily have been carried off by Peter. However, Catherine thought it more prudent to conceal her real plans from Panin. She was equally reticent, even more so, towards the impulsive Princess Dashkoff, in whose discretion she perhaps had reason to have little confidence.

The people with whom she conversed most frankly, and to whom she opened her heart without reserve, were undoubtedly the Orloffs.

Hordt reports that the two Orloffs, who were devoid neither of daring nor of courage, exercised on this occasion all the ascendancy they possessed over the mind of the Empress, and carried her with them in spite of herself, so to speak, and compelled her to consent to the measures adopted for her safety and for that of her son. Catherine informed Poniatovski that it had been agreed to seize the Emperor on his arrival at St. Petersburg, and, in the event of any change in his plans, not to await his arrival but to assemble the guards and proclaim her Empress.

This decision was taken not only in view of the general dissatisfaction of the people, but principally for the reason that a number of officers in the guards had given their consent to place Catherine on the throne. In fact, practically all officers of the guards were hostile to Peter, and a goodly number, thanks to the efforts of the Orloffs, had actually expressed their readiness to spill their last drop of blood for Catherine, and won over their

men to the same frame of mind. The Orloffs are picturesquely described as sowing among the rank and file the seeds of discontent with one hand and distributing largess and vodka with the other. For this purpose funds were needed, and Catherine was always in pecuniary difficulties. Keith had gone over to Peter, Breteuil did not understand the position and had left St. Petersburg; at last Catherine succeeded in borrowing about £10,000 from a British merchant called Felton.

Catherine has herself, in a letter she sent to Poniatovski, described the deposition of Peter III. This letter, of which garbled versions have been published by Grimblot and in Poniatovski's *Mémoires*, is preserved in the State Archives of Russia and an authentic copy has been published by Bilbassoff. The letter is dated from St. Petersburg, the 2nd August 1762. Catherine writes that Peter III had lost the little sense he ever possessed; "He had the intention of breaking up the guards, for which purpose he was about to open the campaign with them; he designed to replace them by troops from Holstein who were to remain in the capital. He wanted to change the established religion, marry Elizabeth Vorontzoff, and lock me up. On the day on which peace was celebrated, after having publicly insulted me at table, he ordered me to be arrested on the same evening. My uncle, Prince George, caused this order to be cancelled; from that day forth I lent an ear to the proposals that had been made to me since the death of the Empress. The plan was to seize him in his room and to lock him up, like Princess Anne and her children. He went to Oranienbaum. We were sure of a large number of captains in the guards regiments. The fate of the secret was in the hands of the three brothers Orloff, of whom Osten remembered having seen the eldest following me everywhere and committing a thousand follies; his passion for me was public property, and everything he did was done with that in view. They are extremely determined people and much loved by the rank and file, having served in the guards. I am under the greatest obligations to these people, to which all St. Petersburg is a witness.

"The minds of the guards were prepared, there were at the end from 30 to 40 officers and nearly 10,000 of the rank and file in the secret. There was no treachery amongst them for three

weeks, because there were four separate factions, the heads of which combined to carry out the plot, the real secret being kept in the hands of these three brothers. Panine wanted it to be in favour of my son, but to this they would never consent.

“ I was at Peterhof, Peter III lived and drank at Oranienbaum. It had been agreed that in the event of a betrayal his return should not be awaited, but that the guards should be assembled and proclaim me. Zeal for me accomplished what a betrayal would have effected. On the 27th a rumour got abroad among the troops that I had been arrested; the soldiers set themselves in motion; one of our officers pacified them; a private went to a captain named Passik, the leader of one of the factions, and told him that I was assuredly lost; but the captain assured him that he had had news of me. This private, still alarmed on my account, went to another officer and told him the same thing; but the latter was not in the secret. Concerned to hear that an officer had allowed this soldier to depart without having him arrested, he went off to his major. The latter caused Passik to be put under arrest. The whole regiment was now in a state of agitation. A report was sent that very night to Oranienbaum. All our conspirators were alarmed. They resolved in the first place to send the second of the Orloff brothers to bring me to town, whilst the other two went about everywhere saying that I was about to arrive.

“ The Hetman, Volkonsky, Panine, were in the secret. I was sleeping quietly at Peterhof at six o'clock in the morning of the 28th. The previous day had been a most anxious one for me, for I knew what was going on. Suddenly there entered into my room Alexis Orloff, who told me in the calmest manner possible: ‘ It is time for you to get up, everything is ready to have you proclaimed.’ I asked him for details; he replied: ‘ Passik has been arrested.’ I hesitated no longer, but dressed myself quickly, without making my toilette, and got into the carriage he had brought. Another officer disguised as a footman was on the step, and a third went in front of us a few miles from Peterhof.

“ At three miles from the town I met the eldest Orloff with the youngest Prince Bariatinsky; the latter gave me his seat in the post-chaise in which they were, for my horses had been given up, and we drove on to the barracks of the Ismailovsky Regiment.

Here there were only twelve men and a drummer who commenced beating to quarters. The soldiers now arrived, kissed me, embraced my feet, my hands, my clothes, calling me their deliverer. Two brought up a priest with the cross. They immediately proceeded to take the oath of allegiance to me, and having done this they begged me to get into a carriage, the priest carrying the cross walking in front. Thus we went to the Semenovsky Regiment, which turned out and marched before us, cheering all the way, to the Kazan Cathedral where I got out. The Preobrajenski Regiment now arrived, cheering also, and crying to me : ' We implore your forgiveness for being the last to arrive, but our officers had put us under arrest ; but we are bringing you four of them here, whom we have taken into custody as a proof of our zeal ; we also desire what our brothers want.' Then came the horse guards ; these were mad with joy,—I have never seen anything like it,—weeping and shouting at the salvation of their country.

" This scene occurred between the garden of the Hetman and the Kazansky ; the horse guards were in parade order with their officers in front. As I knew that my uncle (Prince George), to whom Peter III had given this regiment, was horribly detested by it, I sent some foot guards to my uncle to beg him to remain at home, in order to prevent any accident befalling him ; but his regiment had already sent a detachment to arrest him ; they pillaged his house and maltreated him.

" I proceeded to the new Winter Palace, where the Holy Synod and the Senate were assembled. A manifesto and an oath of allegiance were rapidly drafted. I then went down and made a tour of the troops. There were about 14,000 men, guards and soldiers of the line. As soon as I was seen they all shouted for joy, crowds of spectators taking up and re-echoing their cheers. I went on to the old Winter Palace to concert the necessary measures and complete what I had begun. There we discussed the situation, and it was resolved to proceed, with myself at the head, to Peterhof, where Peter III was to dine. Pickets had been posted along all the main roads, and information was being continually reported.

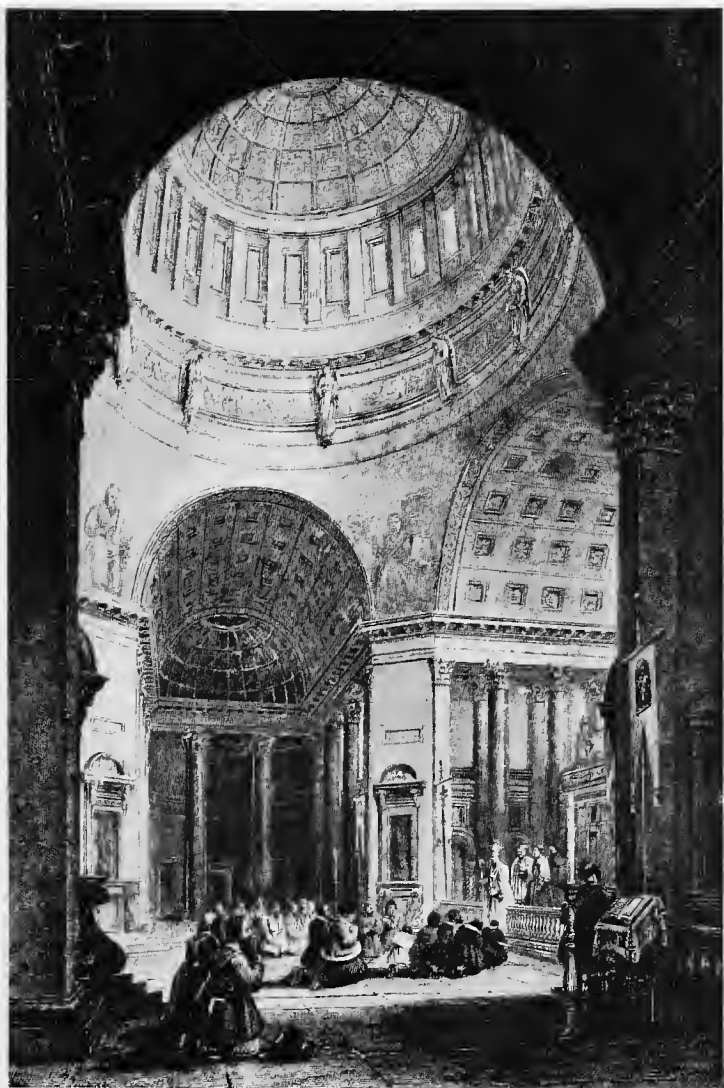
" I dispatched Admiral Talisin to Cronstadt. Vorontzoff, the Chancellor, arrived, sent to reproach me for leaving Peterhof ;

he was taken to church, where he took the oath of allegiance. Thereupon there arrived Prince Troubetskoy and Count Shouvaloff, also from Peterhof, to make sure of their regiments and put me to death ; they were made to take the oath, and offered no resistance.

“ After we had dispatched all our messengers and taken all necessary precautions, I put on the guards’ uniform at about ten o’clock in the evening. Having caused myself to be proclaimed Colonel, amidst indescribable acclamation, I mounted on horseback. We left but a few details from every regiment to guard my son, who had remained in town. I rode out at the head of the troops, and we marched all night to Peterhof ; on arriving at the small monastery on the way, we were met by the Vice-Chancellor, Prince Galitzine, bearing a very flattering letter from Peter III. I have forgotten to state that on leaving the capital three soldiers of the guards came up to me—they had been sent from Peterhof to disseminate a manifesto among the people—and said to me : ‘ Look here, this is what Peter III has charged us with ; we hand it to thee ; we are very glad to have had this opportunity of joining our comrades ! ’

“ The first letter was succeeded by a second, brought by General Michael Ismailoff, who threw himself at my feet and said : ‘ Do you count me as an honest man ? ’ I replied that I did ; whereupon he said : ‘ Well, it is a pleasure to deal with clever people. The Emperor has offered to abdicate. I will bring him to you after his free abdication ; I shall save my country from civil war without any difficulty.’

“ I commissioned him to carry out this project, and he went off to do so. Peter III abdicated at Oranienbaum absolutely of his own free will, surrounded by 5000 Holsteiners, and came to Peterhof with Elizabeth Vorontzoff, Goudovitch, and Ismailoff ; I there gave him five officers and a few soldiers as a body-guard. As it was the 29th, St. Peter’s Day, it was necessary to dine well at noon. While the dinner was being prepared for so many people, the soldiers thought that Peter III had been carried off by Field-Marshal Prince Troubetskoy, and that the latter was trying to make peace between us two ; they therefore began to question all passers-by, and among others, the Hetman, the Orloffs, and many more, saying that they had not seen me for three hours and were mortally afraid lest that old scoundrel of a Troubetskoy



INTERIOR OF KAZAN CATHEDRAL

was not duping me, 'by patching up a false peace between thy husband and thee, and that we lose thee and are lost ourselves; but we will cut him to pieces.' This is how they expressed themselves. I therefore went to Troubetskoy and said to him: 'I pray you get into a carriage, whilst I will make the rounds of these troops on foot.' I told him what was going on. He returned to town in a fright, whilst I was received with extraordinary acclamation.

"After that I dispatched the deposed Emperor in the custody of Alexis Orloff, accompanied by four officers and a detachment of selected and kindly men, to a place called Ropscha, 25 versts from Peterhof, very secluded and pleasant, pending the preparation of suitable and dignified apartments at Schlussemburg and the provision of horses for the journey. But it has pleased God to order otherwise. Fear had loosened his bowels, and he was in this state for three days, but recovered on the fourth, on which day he drank to excess, for he was given whatever he wanted except his liberty. However, he had only asked me for his mistress, his dog, his blackamoor, and his fiddle; but for fear of creating a scandal and increasing the indignation of those who had charge of him I only sent him the three latter articles.

"His hemorrhoidal colics were accompanied by cerebral crises; he was in this condition for two days, and consequently became extremely weak, and in spite of all medical aid he gave up the ghost, asking for a Lutheran pastor. I feared the officers might have poisoned him. I had him cut open, but it was proved that there was not the slightest trace of poison to be found. His stomach was quite healthy, but he had been carried off by an inflammation of the bowels and an apoplectic fit. His heart was extraordinarily small and quite withered."

The above extract from Catherine's letter gives a graphic, and we have every reason to believe an authentic, account of the remarkable revolution which placed her on the throne. The detractors of this phenomenal woman have maintained that in the conduct of this plot she had but plagiarized and copied her prototype the Empress Elizabeth, but if that argument is seriously advanced it but emphasizes the fact that palace revolutions were of comparatively frequent occurrence in Russia in those days, and that she is therefore much less deserving of blame than if she had

conceived a wholly original and fiendish design. In other words, she was but taking the line of least resistance. The law of self-preservation is the most imperative of our nature, and had Catherine refused to listen to her valiant and possibly not entirely disinterested Orloffs, she would not have saved her husband, that is abundantly clear ; she would only have sealed her own doom, and possibly have lost her life before he lost his. As it happened, it was at least a fortunate thing for Russia that she mounted the throne and did not predecease her imbecile consort.

The story of Peter's attempted flight by water to Cronstadt, the refusal of the commandant to receive him, and his humiliating return to Oranienbaum, need not be described at length. He did not finally surrender to his rebellious and triumphant wife before he had satisfied himself that flight was impossible ; for a fight he seems to have had no stomach.

Catherine's account of Peter's death was not in accordance with the facts, and she knew it ; she was not, however, shielding herself, but others—others to whom she owed so much and whom she could not have possibly handed over to justice, even had she wished to do so, which she did not. It is now established beyond all dispute that Peter III was murdered by Alexis Orloff—not Catherine's lover, Gregory, but his brother.

Princess Dashkoff had little reason to be grateful to Catherine, who very reluctantly acknowledged that this girl of nineteen had had any part in the plot which placed her on the throne, for she was anxious to give all the credit to, and bestow all her gratitude on, her splendid and manly lover, the only person who ever inspired her with that true feminine passion in which the object is feared quite as much as he is loved. Yet Princess Dashkoff, who had experienced all the effects of Orloff's jealousy and had suffered the pangs of Imperial disfavour, says in her *Mémoires* :

“ Lest any one should dare to suspect the Empress of having ordered or connived at the murder of her husband, I will here give a proof to the contrary. . . .” Princess Dashkoff, however, does not give the verbatim text of her proof.

This proof is a letter from Alexis Orloff to the Empress, which the latter concealed in a secret drawer. It was found in 1796 and published by Barteneff in the *Archives of Prince Vorontzoff*, vol.

xxi., in Moscow in 1881. The following note by Count Rostopchin, who took a copy of the letter on "the 11th November 1796," five days after the death of Catherine II, is of importance. The note reads :

"Her cabinet was sealed up by Count Samoyloff and Aide-de-camp-General Rostopchin. Three days after the death of the Empress, the Grand-Duke Alexander Pavlovitch (later Alexander I), and Count Besborodko were commissioned to examine all the papers. On the very first day this letter of Count Alexis Orloff was found and brought to the Emperor Paul, who returned it, after perusal, to Besborodko ; and I had it in my hands for a quarter of an hour. The handwriting was well known to me as that of Count Orloff. The paper consisted of a grey and dirty sheet, and the style is characteristic of the state of mind of this malefactor, and clearly proves that the murderers dreaded the anger of the Empress, and thus refutes the slander which blackened the life and memory of that great Empress. The next day Count Besborodko told me that the Emperor Paul had again demanded of him the letter of Count Orloff. After reading it in his presence he threw it into the fire, and himself destroyed the memorial of the Great Catherine's innocence, whereat he was later concerned beyond measure."

Fortunately the careful Rostopchin had made a copy. The letter, written in idiomatic and not very grammatical Russian by an uncultured and obviously drunken guardsman, is given below in an inadequate translation ; the bad spelling it is of course impossible to render.

"LITTLE MOTHER, GRACIOUS EMPRESS.

"How shall I explain, describe, what has happened ? thou wilt not believe thy faithful slave ; but before God I will speak the truth. Little Mother ! I am ready to die for it ; but do not myself know how this misfortune happened. We are lost if thou wilt not be merciful. Little Mother—he is no more. . . . But nobody expected this, and how could we have thought of lifting our hand against the Sovereign. But, Empress, a misfortune has occurred. He quarrelled at table with Prince Theodore (Bariatinsky) ; we had scarcely time to separate them ; when he was no more. We do not ourselves remember what we did ;

but we are all individually guilty and deserving of punishment (death). Have thou mercy upon me, if only for the sake of my brother. I confess myself to thee, there is nothing to investigate. Pardon thou me, or else give orders to end it all quickly. The world is harsh ; we have angered thee and ruined our own souls to eternity."

This letter bears too obviously the impress of drunken sincerity to have been part of a carefully concocted plan between Catherine and her fellow-conspirators. Had the murder of Peter been premeditated, the cause of his supposed accidental death would have been most assuredly carefully prepared. As it was, Catherine was taken completely by surprise. To shield Alexis Orloff was the first and imperative impulse ; it was prompted by the instinct of self-preservation as much as by loyalty to her friends, who had risked their lives for her. On the spur of the moment something had to be devised, and she could think of nothing better than to dispatch the physician Liders to make an autopsy of Peter's body to ascertain the cause of death. According to the evidence of State papers in the Russian Archives, the original design had been to put Peter under lock and key in the fortress of Schlusselfurg and treat him as a state prisoner in the same manner as the Princess Anne and the Emperor Ivan had been treated by the Empress Elizabeth. This original plan had been frustrated by the impetuous drunken fury of Catherine's inconvenient friends.

Princess Dashkoff records how profoundly Catherine was affected by the unexpected intelligence.

Peter's body was buried in the Alexander Nevsky Monastery, next to that of the unfortunate Regent, Princess Anne, and so the incident was closed. Frederick the Great, who seemed to have despised his admirer, said that Peter III had allowed himself to be deposed from the throne like a child that is sent to bed.

CHAPTER XI

ACCESSION

ON the 29th June 1762 Catherine issued from Peterhof a manifesto addressed to the Senators. In this she briefly stated that they themselves were witnesses to the manner in which she had conducted her enterprise, and how the blessing of God had been on it from the very first. She recited how the late Emperor had voluntarily abdicated, without the shedding of blood and without threats or intimidation, but by letters, one dispatched with Prince Galitzin and the other handed to General Ismailoff, in which he begged for mercy and stipulated only that his life might be spared.

On the same evening, at seven o'clock, the troops returned from Peterhof to St. Petersburg, and at the Kurakin villa, half-way to the capital, Catherine, overcome with fatigue, slept for two hours in her clothes. The next day, the 30th June, was a Sunday, and on this she arrived at Catherinehof at ten in the morning. From this place the triumphal entry into the capital was commenced. Preceded by the light cavalry, the hussars leading the way, Catherine, mounted on horseback, at the head of the Preobrajensky Regiment, and followed by the other regiments of footguards, the artillery, and three line regiments, rode into St. Petersburg. The streets were crowded with people, even the roofs of the houses were thronged. The peal of the church bells, the martial strains of the military bands, were joined by the cheers of the multitude. The clergy turned out to meet and bless the procession and sprinkle holy water over the enthusiastic soldiers as they marched past. By noon Catherine arrived at the Summer Palace, where the heir apparent and the members of the Senate and of the Holy

Synod awaited her. She immediately proceeded to the palace chapel to give thanks.

"It was a bright hot day. All the inns and taverns were thrown open to the troops. There was rejoicing and festivity without end," says Derjavin, the Russian historian. Everybody drank the health of the Empress, and the Russian people are famous for their conviviality. Towards evening there was a veritable carnival in the streets. Late at night a drunken hussar suddenly galloped up to the Ismailoff Barracks and shouted out that "those damned Prussians are stealing our little Mother!" At once there was an uproar, and the excited guardsmen, half-mad with drink, sent to the palace and demanded to see the Empress. Nothing less would satisfy them, not even the Orloffs could reassure them. Catherine, who had virtually had no food or sleep since the previous Friday evening, was dead tired and had gone to bed; but she rose to the occasion, got into a carriage, and drove off to the Ismailoff Barracks, where she told the men that she was tired, begged them to go to bed, and let her return and sleep. They apologized, wished her good-night, and retired "like so many sheep," as Catherine herself relates.

On the following 7th July Catherine issued her famous manifesto to the people, addressed to "all our true and loyal subjects, clergy, military, and civilian," in which the causes which led to her assumption of the reins of government are most ably recited. Peter III is accused of lack of veneration for his aunt, and for the memory of his ancestor, Peter the Great, of an impious desire to disinherit his son and heir, Paul, of contempt for the Church, the guards, and the people, of making friendly alliances with the greatest enemies of his country, and of harbouring the intention of putting his wife to death. It had, however, pleased the Almighty to frustrate these evil designs. Catherine, from motives of patriotic devotion to her country, and in order to prevent the discontent of the people from breaking out in open revolt, had taken possession of the government, and Peter III, faithless to the trust confided to him by Providence, and devoid of courage or spirit, had at once and of his own free will abdicated, only stipulating that his life might be spared and that he be allowed to proceed to Holstein with Elizabeth

Vorontzoff and his boon companions, and this only a day after he had actually decreed Catherine's death, a fact which had been demonstrated to her. As, however, he was still surrounded by a number of Holstein guards and other persons, both male and female, whom he might have brought to utter ruin by inciting them against Catherine, she decided to invite him to make formal abdication in writing. The following letter from Peter is then cited :—

“ During the short period of my government of the autocratic State of Russia, I discovered by experience the weight of its burden to be beyond my strength, so that I felt myself unable to govern the State of Russia, whether autocratically or by any other means whatsoever. For which reason I felt within me that a change was going on therein which tended to lead to the loss of its integrity and to my lasting disgrace. In consequence whereof I have myself decided, dispassionately and of my own free will, to declare hereby, not only to the Russian State, but solemnly to the whole world, that I renounce the rulership of the State of Russia for the rest of my life ; ” . . . the letter concludes with the usual circumstantial official terminology and solemn oaths of the period, is dated 29th June 1762, and is signed “ Peter.”

Catherine then goes on to say that in this manner she ascended the autocratic throne of her beloved country without bloodshed but by the aid of God alone and the elect of Russia. She concludes by entreating her subjects to pray with her night and day that she may be vouchsafed strength to wield the sceptre in the interests of true religion, the maintenance and defence of their dear and common country, the upholding of justice, the confusion of all evil, falsehood, and oppression, and the general happiness of the community. The manifesto concludes with a promise of benefits to be conferred as an earnest of the future, and a list of rewards to her friends, from which the Orloffs were not omitted.

A circular addressed to the representatives of foreign powers resident in St. Petersburg was issued a day before the tremendous and bloodless revolution, namely, on the evening of the 28th June. It ran as follows :

“ Her Imperial Majesty having, at the unanimous desire and

the earnest request of her loyal and faithful subjects and true patriots of the Empire, to-day ascended the throne, has been graciously pleased to order all Foreign Ministers at her Court to be informed thereof, and to be assured that Her Imperial Majesty has the intention of living on good and harmonious terms with the crowned heads, their sovereigns. A day will shortly be appointed upon which the Foreign Ministers will be accorded the honour of being presented to Her Imperial Majesty and of offering her their congratulations."

The revolution had been carefully prepared, and it had been brought about without a hitch—a splendid proof of the organizing ability of the conspirators. But the Foreign Ministers were quite unprepared and were taken entirely by surprise. They could scarcely believe their ears. The Emperor was alive, they were told, but being detested by the people, had been deposed from the throne on which his consort had been placed in his stead. The manifesto addressed by the new Sovereign, already described as Catherine II, to her people caused much fluttering in diplomatic dovecots. Keith, in his dispatch of the 15th July 1762, however, at once struck the right note. He said: "So far as I can learn the Empress is determined to be strictly neuter during the continuation of the present war, so that if the King of Prussia has lost a sincere and good ally in the Emperor, he has not got an enemy in his successor, which, I hope, will be a means of facilitating a general and lasting peace."

Thus it is no exaggeration to say that the attitude of Catherine was a big contributing factor towards the termination of the Seven Years War. By so much at least Catherine had already benefited mankind. The further weakening of Prussia could only have increased the power and influence of Austria, and it was not to the interest of a young and rising State like Russia to have on her frontiers powerful neighbours who might be disposed to retard her progress.

This point of view was as a sealed book to the diplomatic envoys, who now began to imagine that Russia would once again throw herself into the arms of Austria and France. What increased their difficulty was the absence of any recognized Minister of Foreign Affairs, for on the recall of Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, who had been exiled in 1758, largely in consequence of his friend-

ship with and loyalty to Catherine, Vorontzoff resigned the Chancellorship on the plea of ill-health. Meanwhile Bestoujeff could not be expected to arrive for some time. In a private letter the Empress wrote: "I trust that God will grant me to rearrange in my own way this foolish alliance" (with Prussia).

The first diplomatic reception was held on the 2nd July, but Von der Goltz, the Prussian Envoy, excused himself from attending, having no court dress. The Empress was gracious to all, and said a few pleasant words to each. Those who believed Von der Goltz to have forfeited her favour were destined to be disappointed, for at the first Court subsequently held she played cards with him, and at the next she went out of her way to be amiable, and paid him great attention.

"On my accession," the Empress wrote, "the onerous war with Prussia was terminated at the desire of Peter III by a peace which gave Russia no advantages beyond quiet." It was not likely that Catherine, with her depleted treasury, would relinquish this advantage for the sake of the aggrandizement of Austria. In a circular addressed to her own representatives abroad, informing them of the manner in which she had ascended the throne of All the Russias, in compliance with the wishes and petition of her loyal subjects, Catherine stated that she desired them to assure the Courts to which they were accredited of her unalterable determination to maintain friendly relations with them all.

As we have seen, the Empress was practically her own Foreign Minister, and was assuming the reins of government with a strong and steady hand.

Bestoujeff arrived on the 12th July; he was sixty-nine and infirm. Béranger, reporting his return, writes: "This aged septuagenarian, weakened by the abuse of wine and spirituous liquors, and benumbed by the life of inaction which he has so long been leading, will, it is said, be but little fit for affairs."

Indéed, the archives of Russia contain abundant proof to show that at this time it was Catherine herself who managed the affairs of the country.

Count Panin, however, was hard at work drawing up a scheme by means of which the autocratic power of the Crown

was to be limited. Originally he had desired to place Paul on the throne and make Catherine regent, a plan which reveals how little he really understood the situation or realized to whose efforts Catherine was indebted for her change of fortune. Orloff had not laboured and risked his life in order to place Paul on the throne. His schemes were more practical. Having been thwarted in his first attempt to gain influence and an independent position, Panin was now elaborating another project which was quite as inept, if not more so, and as much foredoomed to failure as the other. This was nothing less than the introduction of a sort of rudimentary form of constitutional government.

In order to understand his proposal it is necessary to cast a brief glance on Russian methods of government as at that time established.

The old Tzars of Muscovy possessed a number of Chambers for the discussion of various matters of State; these were the Grand and the Lesser, the Golden, the Responsive Chambers, and the Antechamber. Business was conducted orally, no minutes or journals were kept. The patriarch and the metropolitans ranked next in precedence to the Tzar, and before his own blood relations and the other boyars. The decrees of these Chambers were issued in writing (a decree was called an *ookaz*) and were as much in the name of the Tzar as in that of his boyars. The Chambers constituted the Supreme Government and had their seat in Moscow. The interior of the country was divided into large districts governed by *voyevods*, or military leaders, who possessed full administrative and judicial power, collected the revenue, and punished crime.

In 1697, when Peter the Great made his first journey abroad, he appointed a temporary Supreme Government, composed entirely of boyars, or nobles. Peter did not commence his reforms until after his return in 1700: the first of these dealt with the organization of the revenues of the State. The Treasury was established in Moscow, and managed by a president and *burgomasters* elected from among the mercantile community. Nearly every succeeding year witnessed, in spite of continuous wars, the establishment of Government Departments dealing with military, naval, and a variety of civil matters. The Empire

was divided into eight governments, each with a certain number of provinces and districts, and having a governor and an administration; the provinces had voyevods and a provincial chancelry, and to the districts and towns suitable officials were also allocated. The old Chambers disappeared entirely. Peter created Ministers, to whom he entrusted important affairs, and who formed the "Proximate Chancellery." Whenever the Emperor himself presided over this body, which met Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, it was called a "Council."

On the outbreak of the Turkish War, involving the Emperor's absence, the "Administrative Senate" was called into being in 1711, and superseded the former Supreme Government. It was composed of eight Senators, who had to take a special oath of allegiance, but it had no legislative or judicial functions. The detested fiscals were also instituted at this time. The word fiscal has survived in the Russian language to this day, and is used to denote a prying, spying sneak. They were a kind of Inspectors of Inland Revenue and served under a Fiscal-in-Chief. It was their duty to ferret out and report to the Senate all sorts of abuses and irregularities in connexion with the public revenue and to expose to that body any one, without respect of person, who was guilty of malpractices. Later, fiscals were appointed in every government, four in each; their title was subsequently changed to that of *procureur*, or public prosecutor, for they were so unpopular that it was difficult to find people willing to fill their posts.

The key to the arch of the administrative reforms of Peter the Great was no doubt the College. In 1715 Peter instructed his representative in Denmark to obtain for him full particulars of the system of Colleges, "for," as he says, "we have heard that even the Swedes have copied the same." The idea of government by Colleges had first been suggested to Peter in 1698 by Dr. Francis Lee on the occasion of the Tzar's famous visit to England. But it was not until 1720 that the Colleges got into full working order. Schuyler tells us there were nine of these, but Bilbassoff limits their number to eight, namely: (1) Foreign Affairs, (2) Military, (3) Admiralty, (4) Treasury,

(5) Audit, (6) Justice, (7) Commerce, (8) Mining and Manufactures.

These Colleges, or Boards of Commissioners, were each presided over by a Russian president, except in the case of Mining and Manufactures, where, as no suitable Russian could be found, the presidency was given to General Bruce, and each received a foreign vice-president, except the College for Foreign Affairs, whose vice-president was Baron Shafiroff. The presidents appointed councillors and other officials, but the distinctive characteristic of these Colleges was that all business had to be transacted in full session, at which every member had to give his vote. By this means it was hoped to obtain a certain solidarity, not only in the Colleges themselves but for Peter's reforms generally. On the formation of the Colleges Peter prescribed to the members: "To indulge in no empty verbiage or conversation, and never to interrupt each other, but to let one finish his speech before the other began, like orderly people, and not like women at market." But these instructions proved unnecessary—there was no discussion. The president was of much too high a position to be contradicted, and in the Senate he was always supported by his colleagues, for all the Colleges were represented in the Senate, where all public business of importance was to be discussed and in a manner concentrated and focused. Unfortunately this excellent idea was never properly carried out, because, as the Emperor was the President of the Senate, and was not always able to attend, business had a tendency to get postponed.

In 1722 Peter therefore, with unflagging energy and characteristic impatience, started reforming the Senate. Instead of the actual presidents of the Colleges being *ex officio* members, a sort of second or supernumerary president, who knew nothing about their actual business, was appointed to represent each such College. Moreover, a Procureur-General, or Attorney-General, was added, and the duties of the Senate were defined; they had, among other things:

To decide all legal doubts or difficulties arising in the Colleges, and failing a decision to submit their opinions to the Emperor;

To examine all complaints against the Colleges and Chancellories ;

To confer with the governors and voyevods on questions not coming within the purview of the Colleges ;

and generally to control the government of the country, elect certain officers, appoint others, publish new laws and appointments, etc. etc. Besides the Senate and the Colleges there was also the Cabinet, to which Peter summoned the more trustworthy and discreet personages in the realm for the consideration of affairs of State.

The Senate, however, was never a satisfactory body, and the appointment of an Attorney-General to keep it up to the mark apparently failed in its object. After the death of Peter a period of confusion set in. In 1726 a Supreme Privy Council was put over the Senate, and this was itself abolished, together with the Senate, by Anne in 1730. Elizabeth restored the Supreme Governing Senate, but instituted also a "Conference of Ministers" for the discussion of important foreign affairs. In 1756 the scope of this Conference was widened to include all kinds of internal and military matters. In other words, it became a sort of Privy Council or Cabinet, and the wings of the Senate were again considerably clipped.

Meantime Panin had elaborated a scheme of his own. He proposed the formation of an Imperial Council, dividing the Senate into departments, but giving the latter the right of initiating new measures, subject to the approval of the Sovereign.

These proposals can scarcely be described as original or revolutionary. They were submitted to Catherine in July, shortly after her accession, but they found little favour either with her or with her circle.

The attempt to rehabilitate the Senate was perhaps meritorious, but the scheme for an Imperial Council, to consist of from six to eight Imperial Privy Councillors, excited the suspicions of Catherine's entourage. It will be of interest to examine this proposal more in detail. In the second paragraph of Panin's scheme he provides that four of these Privy Councillors should be appointed by the Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs, the Interior, the Army, and the Navy. Further, he goes on to say : " All business coming according to law and the

nature of the monarch's autocratic power within the sphere of our own special care and solicitude, in a word, everything which may assist the autocratic Sovereign in promoting the growth and the welfare of the State, shall be transacted in our Imperial Council, *i.e.* by ourselves personally." In order to shield the Sovereign from error, to which all humanity was prone, the Sovereign would divide the business of the State into four departments and appoint a Secretary of State to each of these, the secretaries thus appointed to be, as it were, the representatives of the Sovereign in their respective departments, and to have vested in them to a certain extent the "solicitude" of the Sovereign in respect of such department. The Imperial Council is further defined as being "nothing else but the place in which we shall labour for the empire, and hence all business coming before us, *i.e.* before the Sovereign, shall be distributed, in accordance with the nature thereof, between these Secretaries of State who shall examine the same in their departments, have it made plain and lucid, and submit it to us in Council, dealing with it subsequently in accordance with our resolutions and decrees." The Council was to meet daily, Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays excepted, and in the presence of the Sovereign each Secretary of State was to submit matters of business for the Imperial decision and approval. The Privy Councillors, on the other hand, should debate these matters and put forth their opinions and arguments, whilst the Sovereign by autocratic decree settled the final decision.

The critics of Panin's scheme were not slow to sniff a nigger in the fence, the thin end of the wedge of responsible government concealed in it. It pleased nobody. The Master-General of Ordnance, Villebois, wrote a lengthy dissertation against it, pointing out that whilst ostensibly purporting to shield the monarchy, it was most astutely calculated to bring about an aristocratic form of government. The influential members of this Imperial Council, from being advisers could easily grow to co-rulers, especially if endowed with the necessary ability, ambition, and determination. This, in the opinion of Villebois, would undermine and destroy the power and greatness of the Russian Empire.

Catherine very diplomatically prolonged the consideration and discussion of Panin's proposed Imperial Council for some

six months or more, and then, even after signing the decree appointing it, tore the whole project up, including her signature. She had no intention of limiting her authority, or of giving people like Panin the right to dictate to her.

The next question to claim the attention of the Empress was her coronation. Peter III had occupied the Russian throne for four months, and, in spite of the urgent counsels of Frederick the Great, had died uncrowned. Catherine, who had studied and who understood the Russian people far better, had not assumed the reins of government four days before she began to think about this important ceremony, appealing so powerfully to the popular imagination. From the 1st July onwards she began to issue a number of orders which left no doubt in the public mind that the coronation would be celebrated at Moscow in the following September, for the rulers of Russia might live and die and be buried in St. Petersburg, but their coronation has always been performed at Moscow.

On the 27th August the Grand-Duke Paul, accompanied by Panin, started on the journey to Russia's ancient capital, and on the 1st September Catherine followed him. She was attended by a suite of twenty-three persons, who required for their transport no less than 63 carriages and 395 horses. Paul's party travelled in 27 carriages, for which 257 horses were needed. Orloff, who preceded the Imperial party by a few days, had also to be provided with a suitable quantity of court equipages and post-horses. It took the posting authorities over a month to collect the necessary quantity of horses. The journey, which under modern conditions does not occupy more than about eight hours, proceeded at a leisurely pace and took up the best part of a fortnight. Catherine was not superstitious, for she made her State entry into Moscow on Friday the 13th September. Seated in an open carriage, escorted by horse guards and surrounded by a brilliant suite, she found the population had turned out to welcome her. Wherever possible, stands had been erected and even the roofs of the houses were crowded. As she proceeded through the town she scarcely recognized it; the houses and interminable garden walls had been gaily decorated with carpets and green trees, while the numerous churches, for which Moscow is famous, pealed their welcome from their belfries, and

the guns boomed impressive salutes all the way to the Kremlin. The sumptuousness of the apparel of the suite surprised even the foreign envoys, who wondered where the money could have come from to provide all this splendour.

The coronation was celebrated on the 22nd September. The town was astir at five o'clock in the morning, at which hour the troops already began to take up their positions. At eight everybody was in his place, and shortly after nine a flourish of trumpets announced the start of the procession. The entire population had turned out to welcome the new and popular Empress.

Attired in the Imperial mantle, which was supported by six Gentlemen of the Chamber, she was met at the steps of the famous Red Portico of the Kremlin by the Archbishop of Novgorod and the Metropolitan of Moscow, the first handing her the cross to kiss, the other blessing her with holy water. Accompanied by 20 prelates, 35 archimandrites, and a number of priests of various grades chanting the 101st Psalm, "I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto Thee, O Lord, will I sing," the Empress proceeded to the cathedral. Here she placed the purple on her own shoulders, and with her own hands put the crown on her head after the manner of the autocrats of All the Russias, Prince Galitzin having offered it on a cushion of gold lace. Hereupon salvos of artillery boomed forth their salutations. During the whole liturgy Catherine stood erect on the throne, the crown on her head, the sceptre in her right hand, and the orb in her left. The Archbishop of Novgorod performed the office of anointing her, and thereupon she proceeded to the sanctuary, through the Imperial gates, and took Communion. After the service the Empress, in her purple coronation robes, wearing her crown, sceptre, and orb, proceeding to the two neighbouring churches, worshipped at the shrines of the saints, the military bands outside playing suitable music, to the accompaniment of the cheers of enthusiastic crowds, amongst whom gold and silver coins were thrown.

The Empress now returned to the palace, and seated in an arm-chair under a canopy she received her courtiers in audience and dispensed favours, the Orloffs being all given the title of Count, whilst Gregory Orloff was appointed Aide-de-camp-General.

In accordance with etiquette the Empress was then "graciously pleased to dine by herself on the throne in public." At the steps of the throne stood the higher court functionaries and the Orloffs, whilst the dishes were brought in by colonels and placed on the table by the Lord Chamberlain, or Court-Marshal, kneeling. At a signal from the Empress the whole assembled company, who had all been standing, sat down at the tables provided, and the banquet commenced. During dinner the guests were entertained with vocal and instrumental music.

At night the Kremlin was illuminated, especially the tall belfry of Ivan the Great, and the people thronged to admire the unwonted spectacle. The Empress came out incognita at midnight to look at the illuminations and mingle with her subjects, but was speedily recognized and loudly cheered, and had thereupon to retreat into the palace.

The coronation festivities lasted a whole week. The Empress received the nobles, gentry, and officers, and all sorts and conditions of people, whilst the street-fountains ran with wine, and oxen were roasted in the open, and largess was distributed amongst the people. On Friday there was a grand ball at which, however, Catherine was present as a spectator only and did not dance. On Saturday there was a great public dinner. The officers of the staff and of the guards were entertained in the palace, and for the general public banqueting-tables were erected in certain squares and open places in the town, to which all were bidden, and at which the meats and baked dishes, to say nothing of the drinkables, were served without stint. There were separate tables for the very poor and destitute, who received gifts of money in addition. At the palace there was an Italian State concert. Another grand banquet was given by Catherine on Sunday to all those who had attended the coronation ceremony, and this was followed by a most successful display of allegorical fireworks, representing Russia delivered from darkness by the brilliant appearance of a phenomenal Catherine amidst a terrific detonation of *feu de joie*.

These official court festivities were succeeded by a series of private entertainments, theatrical performances, masquerades, etc., at the houses of notable residents, all of which Catherine graced with her presence.

Nor was the University of Moscow to be eclipsed. At a great speech-day on the 3rd October the Professor of History made a Latin oration on the benefits conferred on learning by enlightened Governments, and the love bestowed upon it by powerful monarchs, whilst the Professor of Rhetoric dwelt upon the greatness of the public rejoicings on the occasion of this auspicious and blessed coronation. Unfortunately the Empress was prevented from attending this function. On the 30th September the Grand-Duke Paul, the eight-year-old heir apparent, was seized with a fever, and from the 1st of October to the 7th, during which week his health gave cause for grave anxiety, Catherine never left his bedside. She made a vow that if he recovered she would build a hospital to his memory, and as he speedily got well she caused the famous Pavlovsky Hospital to be erected in Moscow.

The Grand-Duke Paul left his bed on the 13th of October, and on the 17th Catherine proceeded in state to the time-honoured Troitza Monastery (the Monastery of the Holy Trinity) to give thanks and to kiss the relics which are there preserved.

She continued in Moscow with intervals until the following spring, and during the whole of that time the town was *en fête*, the various nobles vying with each other in the splendour of their entertainments.

The Earl of Buckingham, the British Envoy, describes the theatricals performed at the Moscow Court, which presented a picture of magnificence truly imperial. The leading parts were taken by the Countess Bruce and Count Orloff. The play was a French translation of a Russian tragedy, which Buckingham praises, and was followed by dances performed by ladies of the Court and members of the highest aristocracy, all of whom are reported to have been remarkably beautiful. The orchestra was also supplied by amateurs. He reflects upon the extraordinary refinement and culture of the Russian Court, which had but recently been so deficient in these qualities, and lets us see that the humanizing influence of Catherine was already making itself felt.

Nor were the people ignored. In January it was publicly announced that there would be a masquerade procession on the 30th of that month and the 1st and 2nd of February from ten a.m.

to noon, along certain streets, and to be called the Triumph of Minerva, illustrating the hideousness of vice and the blessedness of virtue. Theatres were specially erected for the free entertainment of the people; there were booths in which jugglers and acrobats performed, in which ballets were given and national dances exhibited, in short, the populace of Moscow were offered an entertainment such as they had never beheld since the town had existed. The procession consisted of four thousand persons and of two hundred allegorical cars. The poet Kherassoff wrote a poem descriptive of the Masque, which was divided into twelve sections representing the various vices, such as drunkenness, insubordination, etc.; for each appropriate choral songs were composed by Volkoff. There were harlequins and furies, mounted on camels, trumpeters, tigers, moving mountains. Bribery, for instance, was represented by a female form, "Perquisites," hatching eggs, from which emerged the bribes in the shape of harpies, which preceded the deformed and halting figure of "Lame Justice."

This procession, with its numerous moral lessons, such as illustrations of the fate of those possessed of ill-gotten wealth, clowns, and misers who had enriched themselves by usury but had remained ignorant and brutish, women who had lost human rationality and bestowed their affections on asses and monkeys—the author had evidently read Shakespeare—were a source of delectation not only to the masses, but were viewed with merri-ment by the Court and even the Empress herself.

After this three days' carnival Lent interrupted the coronation festivities, and soon after Easter Catherine proceeded to Rostoff to worship at the shrine of St. Demetrius, a saint whose relics were discovered in the reign of Elizabeth. Peter the Great had prohibited by decree this relic-mongering to which all superstitious nations are addicted, and it was not until the advent of his daughter to the throne that this particular manifestation of religious perversion was revived and encouraged. Elizabeth had ordered a silver shrine for this saint's relics, but died before its completion. Catherine, having ascertained that the shrine was now ready, considered it politic to announce publicly that she intended to place the relics in position herself. In this way she would appeal to the popular imagination as the defender of the

Orthodox Faith and bring out in still stronger contrast the difference between herself and her heretical husband and predecessor, Peter III. It was indeed an act of consummate wisdom and political tact. We have seen how greatly Peter III had enraged the priesthood against him by his scoffing attitude towards the ritual, his projected reforms, and his scheme for confiscating the estates and property of the Church. To impress the people still more, and in imitation of the Empress Elizabeth, who had always had so strong a hold on the imagination and affections of her subjects, she performed the pilgrimage on foot.

On the whole, Catherine was delighted with the success of her accession and coronation, and the people were delighted with her. The Metropolitan of Novgorod gave a peculiarly religious turn to her assumption of power in an address in which he ascribed her accession to purity of motive, a desire to save the Church and the national institutions of the country from ruin. She was represented as the instrument of the Divine Will in the protection of true religion.



THE EMPRESS CATHERINE

CHAPTER XII

THE DEBUT

ON her accession Catherine proved herself to be a woman possessed of strong determination and phenomenal energy; at the meetings of the Senate she displayed a statesmanship and political insight which surprised even those who knew her best. Many years later she wrote her own account of her attitude towards this body, and, allowing for trifling inaccuracies and pardonable exaggerations, Bilbassoff maintains this, the following, description to be substantially true:

“On the fifth or sixth day after Catherine’s accession to the throne, she appeared in the Senate, which, in compliance with her orders, had been transferred to the Summer Palace, with a view to the acceleration of the transaction of business. The Senate commenced proceedings by making representations regarding the serious lack of funds: the army in Prussia had not been paid for eight months; the price of bread in St. Petersburg had risen to double the ordinary. The Empress Elizabeth had towards the end of her reign hoarded up as much money as she could and kept it for herself, refusing to employ it for the needs of the empire; the whole country was in a state of destitution; salaries remained unpaid. Peter III acted in a similar manner. When these rulers were asked to provide money for the good of the country they indignantly replied: ‘Find your money where you like, but these hoarded funds are ours!’ Both he and his aunt distinguished between their personal requirements and the needs of their country. Catherine, recognizing the general destitution, announced in a full assembly of the Senate, that as she herself belonged to the State she considered that everything she possessed was likewise the property of the State, and that she desired that in future no distinction should be made between

her personal interests and those of the empire. This announcement drew tears from the eyes of the assembly, who rose from their seats and unanimously testified their lively gratitude for the wisdom of her sentiments. Catherine disbursed as much money as was required, and temporarily prohibited the export of cereals, in consequence of which the price of all provisions fell considerably within two months."

Bilbassoff has ascertained that Catherine attended the meetings of the Senate about twice a week, thus demonstrating the importance she attached to this, the highest institution of the Russian State.

That Catherine did not regard her pin-money, or Civil List, as we should call it, as her own property, she had indeed abundantly proved before, and only a year ago, when large stores were destroyed by a conflagration in St. Petersburg, and neither Elizabeth nor Peter came to the aid of the merchants who had lost their all in the fire, Catherine requested the Senate to report all the circumstances to her, and contributed thirty thousand roubles out of her private purse towards the erection of masonry stores. The reduction of the salt tax cost the Treasury Rs.600,000, and Catherine contributed Rs.300,000 out of her Civil List towards this deficit.

Of course it was easy for Catherine to undo the evil that had been done in the previous reign, to reopen the private chapels, which had been closed by Peter, to repeal the innovations introduced by him in the army, to stop the Danish War, send the Holstein contingent back to the land they came from, etc., but by such measures she only restored the *statu quo ante*. She had a wider object in view, which she developed in a series of political-economical measures for the benefit of the country and submitted to the consideration of the Senate. She abolished the farming of taxes and of tobacco and other monopolies, and she introduced free trade in a number of branches of commerce and industry. She also took an active interest in purifying the law courts and stamping out bribery and corruption, in which, however, she was only partly successful.

But Catherine's primary concern, as Empress of Russia, was with the population of the country. As Grand-Duchess we find her writing: "We are in need of population. Cause the people to swarm in great numbers if possible in our expansive stretches

of waste land." She was now able to give effect to her dreams, and she instructed the Senate to invite immigrants from abroad. Peter the Great had imported all manner of artisans and technical experts, but Catherine conceived the idea of founding entire colonies, which would be centres for the distribution of culture. It was hoped that foreign methods of agriculture, foreign customs and modes of thought, alien industry and energy, would turn the desert into an oasis and "multiply the prosperity of the country." These hopes, through no fault of Catherine's, but rather in consequence of the amateurishness of the official classes and their absence of practical knowledge and method, were not destined in the end to be as fully justified as might have been expected. The manifesto inviting colonists to settle in Russia was not published until the 4th December 1762, but within two years complaints were widely raised in Western Europe against the wholesale exodus to Russia of entire families of workers and artisans, as well as against the corrupt malpractices of the immigration agents. Durand, who certainly held no brief for Catherine, nevertheless acknowledges in his *Mémoires sur les colonies russes* that she spared neither pains nor money in carrying out her idea, and states that in 1765 and 1766 the Russian Government expended Rs.7,000,000 in promoting the migration of 20,000 families. He says that the manifesto read like an offer by a benevolent genius of an asylum to the arts. Arms seemed to be extended in welcome to disappointed artisans and luckless farmers. The most generous aid was promised, innumerable privileges accorded, and absolute toleration assured. So many combined advantages worked powerfully on the imagination. The present author visited and described some of these German colonies on the Volga in 1892,¹ and found they had not fulfilled the sanguine expectations of the benevolent Empress. They may be described as backwaters in the stream of Russian national life; modern progress had not touched them, but had left them behind. They constitute little more than fossilized and artificially preserved remnants of the eighteenth century, as well in their manners, customs, utensils, and furniture, as in their appearance, dress, and mode of life and thought. For this, however, the Empress Catherine herself was scarcely to blame.

¹ *In the Track of the Russian Famine*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892.

Catherine was not content with attracting foreign immigrants to Russia, she turned her attention with equal solicitude to the question of stemming the stream of emigration which had so violently set in and was threatening entirely to denude the country of a population already too sparse. Nor was this all; she tried to attract and draw back the people who had already forsaken their native land. This wholesale emigration was indeed a melancholy feature of the times. The introduction, or legalization, for there are differences of opinion on this point, of the institution of serfdom by Peter the Great, in conjunction with the onerous burden of his military system and the intolerance of the Church, had brought about a state of things which made the life of the lowly peasant practically unbearable, and as what is intolerable cannot be endured, the people fled in their thousands from the oppression of the landowner, the cruelty of the corporal, and the persecution of the priest. On the accession of Catherine these refugees presented a formidable international problem. During the Seven Years War the desertions from the Russian army abroad had assumed very considerable proportions; and at the conclusion of peace Russian deserters were distributed throughout Prussia, Saxony, and the Austrian Empire, but by far the largest number were to be found in Poland.

Russian deserters, dissenters, and absconding peasants generally did not prefer the neighbouring kingdom so much for its political and other privileges, of which they scarcely had a conception, but simply because life had become intolerable at home, and because Poland was the nearest country to run away to.

As Grand-Duchess, Catherine had written: "There will be little reason to fear that the number of Russian fugitives may increase abroad as soon as we make their country lovable to the people. If Russia were but such as I should like to see it we should have more recruits than deserters."

This pregnant sentence Catherine now felt called upon to justify by acts. She directed her first attention towards the mining population. Owing to the difficulty of obtaining labour for working mines, the Government had granted mine-owners the right to purchase workers. These unfortunate slaves, left to the inhuman supervision of relentless managers and taskmasters, whilst the mine-owners lived luxuriously at Court, were treated

with revolting and savage cruelty; they were compelled to labour beyond the limits of human endurance, and were frequently even tortured, kept in abject subjection, swindled and cheated of their due; whenever they ventured to raise their voices in protest they were declared to be in revolt, and soldiers were sent for to quell the insurrection. At the commencement of Catherine's reign the number of such insubordinate mining peasants was computed at 49,000. In the previous reign a commission had been appointed to inquire into the revolt of the mining and factory hands of the province of Perm. But this commission had not been able to finish its labours before Catherine issued a decree striking at the very root of the trouble, and prohibiting the purchase of slaves for the purpose of working mines and factories, and making it compulsory to engage labour for wages.

But the excellent intentions of the benevolent Empress merely acted like the pouring of oil on the flames. All over the mining and manufacturing districts of northern Russia and Siberia strikes and riots spread like an epidemic. Everywhere the miners struck and refused to resume work; those who showed any disposition to return to the mines and factories were treated as blacklegs, and beaten and ill-used.

Before Catherine's well-meant reforms could be introduced it became imperative to restore order. For this purpose Catherine appointed Quartermaster-General Prince A. A. Viazemsky, a young, energetic, and upright nobleman of proved integrity, whose instructions have continued to our own times to be the model for the attitude of the Government towards such manifestations; they were, namely, first to put down the insurrection, and to study its causes and devise measures to satisfy the rioters afterwards. In order thus to begin at the wrong end, it was necessary to bring the military on the scene in sufficient numbers. The riots were thus quickly quelled, but no remedial measures were subsequently introduced. Of course the riots soon broke out again, and even artillery had to be used in putting them down. It was not until 1779 that the condition of the workers was improved and their labour legally regulated.

These internal disorders did not spring so much from the institution of serfdom and the corruption of officials, as from the general disorganization of the country and the anarchy which

had prevailed in the interior ever since the death of Peter the Great ; for that monarch had died before he had had time to complete his reforms. The measures he had inaugurated had not taken root, and those which were projected but had not taken shape were left in the air, his successors living from hand to mouth without foresight and void of political ideas.

The clergy and the nobility, the army and the commercial classes, all looked to Catherine for privileges and reforms. The condition of fortresses and towns, of justice and finance, roads and postal facilities, of the fleet and of trade and commerce, all required reorganization, amelioration, and reform. Soon after her coronation, Catherine, recognizing the number, importance, and urgency of the problems awaiting solution, appointed a series of commissions to study these various questions : a commission on the liberties of the nobility, a military commission, an ecclesiastical commission, a commission on town planning, a commission on trade, etc. etc.

The foreign envoys at the Court of St. Petersburg have borne witness to the indefatigable laboriousness of Catherine, who " forgot nothing in her desire to justify the choice of the nation," and " regulated the affairs of the interior, taking cognizance of everything." Breteuil writes to Paris to say that " M. de Worontzoff " had told him that all Catherine wanted was peace, and that the disorganization of all the internal parts of the State would not admit of any other plans or schemes for long years to come. The Saxon Envoy wrote : " Sessions of the Senate and the Ministry are being held daily at Court, at which Her Majesty the Empress is customarily present herself." And a year later, in March 1763, he reports : " The Empress appears to be largely profiting by the present Lenten season in order to devote herself to the manifold improvement of the organization of the internal affairs of the country."

But it was not only the country which was in a state of anarchy, there appears to have been no order even at the Court itself. A fortnight after she commenced her reign Catherine issued a decree proclaiming that no one should have access to the Court, whether native or foreigner, without proper presentation by the Lord Chamberlain or the Mistress of the Robes.

A week later she presided at a meeting of the Senate at which

it was proposed to give commissions in the army to a whole tribe of dismissed court lackeys, waiters, kitchen attendants, etc., some of whom had not done more than a year's service. Catherine promptly vetoed this proposal, thereby causing considerable discontent amongst these groundlings. While she was in Moscow in the August of 1762 the disorder in the palace was so great that she wrote to the Lord Chamberlain to complain that her maids were being starved, and had not had food for two days.

The greatest difficulty with which Catherine was confronted in her efforts to improve the conditions of the people she had undertaken to rule was the old difficulty which had confronted Peter the Great, and was to prove the stumbling-block of his successors: the difficulty of finding the men needed to carry out the work. Catherine's greatest need was honest, capable statesmen. These she had herself to find and train. We have seen in a previous chapter how little the Russian Court was calculated to be a nursery of efficiency. Neither Elizabeth nor Peter III had formed a school of statesmanship or left behind them a body of trustworthy and intelligent administrators. The Shouvaloffs and Vorontzoffs were out of the question for more than one reason. Bestoujeff-Ryoumin, the ablest of them all, was infirm, obstinate, uncompromising, and indolent, a man who could not adapt himself to altered circumstances. Panin, fat and self-indulgent, on whose loyalty no absolute reliance could be placed, was at least cultured, in the prime of life, clever, adroit, and tactful; he knew how to manage those with whom he was brought in contact, and to reconcile their various conflicting aspirations. Gregory Teploff, the Secretary of the Empress, was a man of low origin, equally low cunning, unscrupulous, unprincipled, a fawning sycophant, of grossly immoral life, and no integrity, but considerable ability of a certain kind.

In a dispatch dated 9th January 1763, Breteuil says: "Some days ago the Empress complained to me that she had nobody who could be of any real assistance to her. It is true that with the exception of M. Panine, who, however, possesses rather an aptitude for a certain amount of work than great intelligence or knowledge, this Princess has nobody who could serve her in furthering her ideas of government or greatness."

The Earl of Buckingham, the British Ambassador, writing

under the 25th November 1762, says, in referring to the Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor : " The more I see of these gentlemen the less they appear to me capable of directing the affairs of a great nation. . . . Mr. Bestucheff is old, and has the appearance of being still older ; if he is now capable of business, it cannot last long ; it is said he is greatly consulted ; and his behaviour to me at least implies that he would have it thought so. Mr. Panin, who seems better qualified than most of the Russian Ministers to hold the first place, probably shares the Empress's confidence with him ; but the Empress Herself, from all the observations I can make, and all the lights I can obtain, is, in talents, information, and application, greatly superior to everybody in this country. Hampered by the obligations She has lately received, conscious of the difficulty of Her situation and fearful of the dangers, with which She must hitherto have thought Herself surrounded, She can't as yet venture to act of Herself and get rid of many of those about Her, whose characters and abilities She must despise. For the present She takes every method to gain the confidence and affections of Her subjects ; if She succeeds, She will exert the authority She acquires, to the honour and advantage of Her Empire. I have frequently met with Teploff, one of the Empress's secretaries ; he is a creature of Count Mercy's, but seems a most ignorant, pretending fellow. Rasoumowski, who, from the part he took in the revolution, is at present greatly noticed by Her Imperial Majesty, is governed by him ; he could hardly give a worse proof of his understanding."

In a later dispatch of the Earl of Buckingham's, dated 26th March 1763, he says : " It gives me some concern to mention that the interior of this Government is in great confusion, and the Senate publishes resolutions one day, which are reversed the next. There is not the same appearance of general satisfaction and cheerfulness which prevailed two months ago ; and many even venture to hint their disapprobation of the Measures of the Court. Her Imperial Majesty shows Orloff every day fresh marks of distinction ; Her partiality is indeed so far decided, as to offend those who think themselves, from their rank, situation, and ability better entitled to Her favour. . . . The Foreign Ministers seem all equally ignorant where to find the real Minister. Mr. Panin has the first sight, after the Empress, of all foreign

correspondence, which from him is carried to Mr. Bestucheff. They thwart each other and everybody else ; they have each of them weight enough to keep Her Imperial Majesty undecided, but neither of them sufficient to bring Her to a determination. It is said She has a better opinion of Mr. Bestucheff's abilities and information, but that She esteems Mr. Panin as the honester and more unbiassed man. The latter has been flattered into the French interest."

Some months later, 22nd August 1763, he writes again :

" I cannot omit taking this opportunity of laying before His Majesty, more fully than I have hitherto done, the state of this Government. There is at present no Minister, nor is there a prospect of any persons being placed in that situation ; every little department has a nominal head, but little is done in any of them. . . . The Empress's life is a mixture of trifling amusements and intense application to business, which, however, from the difficulties, which are often industriously put in Her way, as well as the variety of schemes at once, has as yet produced nothing. Numerous and extensive are Her plans, but greatly inadequate the means She is able to employ."

Henry Shirley writes, under date 20th July 1768 :

" It must be confessed that the Empress of Russia understands the proper manner of governing Her subjects, much better than could have been expected from a foreign Princess ; She is so well acquainted with their genius and character, and She makes so good a use of this knowledge, that their happiness seems to the nation in general to depend on the duration of Her reign. It is surprising what difficulties She has had to conquer and how unaffectedly assiduous She has been in removing every object that could give Her the least uneasiness. The Crown is now so firmly settled on Her head, that I cannot foresee any accident capable of obliging Her to place it on Her son."

We shall now proceed to examine and enumerate some of the measures which this remarkable woman introduced.

The most important of the questions she grappled was that of the ecclesiastical lands, for which she called a commission into being. This was one of those questions which Peter the Great had attempted to solve, but had been prevented by death from tackling. In 1701 he had decreed " that all ecclesiastical

estates should be surveyed and placed under lay supervision, whilst the priesthood should be paid a suitable stipend for their maintenance, as well as corn and the necessities of life; the remaining revenues to be devoted to charity." Twenty years later, on the institution of the Holy Synod, Peter handed the ecclesiastical estates over to an Ecclesiastical Board of Government, but no progress was made, and for forty years the ecclesiastical lands continued in an unsettled state. At last Peter III promulgated on the 21st March 1762 his famous decree by which the peasantry, against a nominal pepper-corn rent, received the ecclesiastical lands to cultivate for their own benefit. By this decree, which revolutionized the condition of the clergy more than any other act, Peter III prepared his own downfall.

The Metropolitan Arsenius complained that in consequence of this measure the priesthood were faced with starvation, their cattle and poultry had been taken from them, and there was no fodder for the few horses which had been left them, and soon there would be nobody left to perform the rites of religion or to conduct the church services, as the priests were being driven to go about begging for alms to keep themselves alive.

Soon after the accession of Catherine the Senate handed her a petition for the virtual repeal of the decree of Peter III, and a few months later a commission was created to investigate the revenues of the clergy and to make suitable dispositions regarding their estates. In this question Catherine took up, as usual, an original line. While she refused to allow the peasants on ecclesiastical lands to be emancipated from serfdom and be made freeholders at the expense of the Church, she did not, on the other hand, consider the monasteries and clergy competent to administer these estates themselves. In this she followed the precedent of Peter the Great, and while she no doubt acted in the best interests of the country she failed to satisfy the clergy, who remained discontented. The interesting point, however, is, that while she appointed a commission to deal with this question, she virtually anticipated its conclusions, and laid down the lines on which they were to frame their recommendations. This course was very characteristic of Catherine's masterful nature, and significant of the times. As we have seen, there was a dearth of competent statesmen, and yet the country had

to be governed, and reforms had to be introduced. Catherine had to rely entirely on herself, but, being a woman, she had to shield herself behind commissions, male advisers who had to carry out her instructions. Later, as we shall see, she found a statesman in whom she had confidence ; but it may well be questioned whether the country would not have been better governed had she continued to manage its affairs unaided, although doubtless the burden and the strain might have been too great.

The next important reform to be inaugurated was the proper organization of the army, which had been grossly mismanaged by Peter III, and for this purpose another commission was appointed. This commission, composed of generals, had for its principal object an inquiry into recent promotions, and the creation of an orderly administration and organization.

But of all the reforms introduced at about this time none was probably more remarkable in its effect and more far-reaching in its influence than the celebrated emancipation of the nobles. The nobles of Russia were not a nobility as understood in England, France, and Germany, to say nothing of Italy and Spain. The nobles were practically the landed gentry, and they had been placed under special restrictions by Peter the Great. On pain of forfeiting their rights and privileges, they had to serve the State in some capacity or other, pass examinations, and become a part of that bureaucracy, that *tchinovnitchestvo* which that ruler had invented as a means of keeping his unruly gentry in subordination and securing the necessary officials with whom to govern his Europeanized empire. These unfortunate gentry were not permitted to travel abroad without special permission, nor were they exempt from corporal punishment, whilst those who failed to pass the necessary qualifying examination, or from any other cause abstained from serving the State, were drafted into the army as private soldiers and subjected to disciplinary severities comparable with those practised on the legionaries of ancient Rome. Peter III, with his strong German instincts, was anxious to create a noble caste, such as had been the backbone of Prussia, and freed the nobles from all liabilities, trusting to their honour and sense of patriotism for their service to the State, and giving them full freedom of travel, whilst exempting

them from corporal punishment. Catherine not only confirmed this act of her husband's, she went further, she consolidated the country gentry by giving them a corporate existence, and permitting them to elect from amongst their midst local presidents or marshals of nobility, and thus introducing what at that time was regarded by many as the rudiments of self-government.

In a work entitled *La Russie à la Fin du 19^e Siècle*, prepared under the editorship of M. W. Kovalevsky for the Paris Universal Exposition of 1900, Catherine's reforms are tersely and succinctly described. "The Empress Catherine confirmed the liberties of the nobility. Influenced by the ideas of Montesquieu, the Great Empress thought that the nobility constituted an intermediary force between the monarch and the people, a mediatory power, moderating the Monarchy and giving it a legalized character. These ideas caused the legislation of Catherine to give the nobility a corporate organization, to confer on them certain political rights, and to permit this class to take a large share in local government. The nobility had the right to hold, and to be elected to, a large number of judicial and administrative offices, and among the administrative officials of the province their marshals attained to great importance."

The same writer, treating of the townsmen, or burgher class, says that this class was formed by Peter I and Catherine II: "Tempted by the idea of founding a flourishing urban class on the pattern of the bourgeoisie of Western Europe, these great reformers desired to give to this class the elements of an independence, in the conferring of which Russian history had no part. For this purpose the urban class was in a manner rehabited in the forms of civic liberty current in Europe in the Middle Ages. This class was subdivided into guilds and corporations. By the Municipal Statute of 1785 Catherine II divided townspeople into four categories, namely, notable citizens of distinction, merchants, artisans belonging to livery companies or trade societies, and burghers. All these categories of inhabitants constituted a corporate unit entrusted with the duty of ensuring public order in the town; for which purpose they were accorded the right of assembly and of electing a Duma for deliberating on the affairs of the town." After saying that the citizens had the right of electing a mayor to preside over the Duma, to

administer civic affairs, and to be a member of the Municipal Executive Commission, M. Kovalevsky adds : " In its essential features, this decree remained in force until 1870," a testimony either to the statesmanship of Catherine or the conservatism of her successors.

But it is too early to talk of 1785. Nor do we propose to describe the subdivision of the Senate into departments. But that Catherine from the first ruled her Senate and made it feel that the Empress was no mere figure-head, may be gathered from the following address, which she sent it on the 6th June 1765 :

" GENTLEMEN, SENATORS !

" I cannot say that you have shown no patriotic care for My interests or for that of the public, but with regret I must nevertheless tell you, that the transaction of business is not attended with the success which is desirable. What the reason for this might be We have been prompted to investigate, and We have at last discovered the causes, which consist solely in this, that those attending the Senate have internecine discord, enmity, and hatred, and that one has no patience for the affairs brought forward by another, for which reason they are divided into parties, and endeavour to seek means of vexing each other—in a word, they do things that are improper for intelligent, respected, and well-meaning people. What arises from this ? Nothing but boundless spite and strife, and from this no desired benefit can accrue either to Our own interests or to the welfare of Our subjects. I think that any one who will honestly place his conscience as a judge over himself must unreservedly acknowledge that this Our statement is true.

" You yourselves know well enough : how useful it is, not only among the leading members of the State, but amongst the intermediary and even the lowliest people, to have a good understanding in the management of affairs ; all the more, on the contrary, is it harmful and destructive to a State to have discord, enmity, and disagreement. Finally, it may be mentioned that discord and disagreement among the highest of the land, however patient and gracious the Monarch may be, will hourly provoke him to anger ; your discord therefore causes disquietude and anxiety to many. Not the least cause for this discord is

that some censure the work of others, without regard to its utility, for the reason only that it is not their own, although they themselves are incapable of such work. But in such cases it is necessary to use common sense and to recognize that people are not equally talented, and consequently it is the duty of everybody in all circumstances to be modest and to follow without obstinacy or vanity the dictates of common sense, and by that means accomplish useful undertakings.

“ And thus We, having sufficiently explained Our wishes and thoughts, in conclusion of this Our word, declare that nothing can be more agreeable to Us than to see the discord, the enmity, and the hatred, which seems to have taken such root, entirely eradicated, and that in its place, to the consolation of Ourselves and the common weal, to see arise love and harmony, and unanimous striving for the good of Our beloved country. In which may you be aided and sustained by the right hand of the Almighty ! ”

The above, while it affords ample evidence of the wisdom, patience, and moderation of this great monarch, also shows how difficult was the task she had undertaken. A clique of intriguing courtiers, greedy place-hunters, without principles or character, was not easy to keep in leash. Moreover, ominous rumblings were being heard ; there were indications, vague and indefinite it is true, of discontent, of insubordination, even of conspiracies and revolt. We must deal with these disconcerting phenomena in the next chapters. Meanwhile, as we have been treating of the reforms introduced by Catherine, it may be as well here to mention two others, the institution of Foundling Hospitals in all the chief centres of the country for the purpose of adopting all sorts and conditions of children without inquiry, and the codification of the laws. With regard to this latter measure Sir George Macartney, writing under date December 5/16, 1766, says : “ At present the Czarina’s attention is principally engaged by a favourite project, the success of which will do Her more real honour, and be of greater advantage to Her, than the winning of a battle or the acquisition of a kingdom. She, whose penetrating genius is equally happy in discovering defects and in finding resources to remedy them, has long beheld with regret

the confusion, tediousness, ambiguity, and injustice of the laws of Her Empire : to correct them has long been the object of Her ambition, and for this purpose She examined and compared with the utmost attention and precision the different legislations of other Countries. From Her own observations upon the whole, and from the opinions of Her most learned and able counsellors, She has formed a code of laws equally adapted to the good of Her subjects and the genius of Her people. This code is to be laid before the States of the Empire assembled at Moscow in the course of next summer, who are to deliver their sentiments upon it, to mark what appears defective to them, and to propose their alterations. When these points are agreed upon and finally settled, the whole is to be published as the solemn law of the Empire for the future. A most noble undertaking, and worthy the ambition of a great Prince, who prefers the title of legislator to the fame of conquest, and founds his glory upon providing for the happiness and not the destruction of mankind."

In her efforts to stamp out bribery and corruption she was equally earnest but less successful.

While the Empress was thus concerned for the welfare of her people she had too little confidence in her advisers to part with any tittle of her power. There is a legend to the effect that she was once approached by a deputation who petitioned her to grant the nation a constitution. It is said that she thereupon ordered her counsellors to search the Archives and ascertain what reply had been given by Peter the Great under similar circumstances. The Archives were searched and the reply of Peter the Great was found to be of too coarse a nature to be repeated to Catherine's ears. She is reported to have rejoined : " Oh ! very well. Give the deputation the same answer ! "

But if she refused her subjects the liberties for which they were not yet ripe, she at least introduced a milder system, and put an end to the tortures and brutal severities of preceding reigns.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ORLOFFS

IT will now be necessary to cast a glance at what must be called the internal situation at the Court. To all outward appearances Catherine was the most enviable contemporary ruler in Europe. A few months ago she was in danger of divorce, incarceration for life, or even a shameful death, but owing to a curious concatenation of circumstances, among which her own ability, prudence, and courage played no unimportant part, the situation had been reversed. In her case we fear it cannot be said that virtue had triumphed, but it is nevertheless certain that her great qualities of mind and heart had prevailed over the pusillanimous machinations of her enemies. Had Peter III by a miracle escaped the vengeance of his subjects and retained his throne, he would undoubtedly have ruined his country and have probably become a vassal of Prussia. Fortunately for Russia his hands were too feeble to retain the reins of government, and they were snatched from him by a stronger and more masterful spirit. Catherine had, besides an aptitude for government, great ideas, a high sense of public duty, and a marvellous power of work. She possessed to a remarkable extent that infinite capacity for taking pains which, while it is so frequently an accompaniment of genius, is distinctly separate from, nor can the one be with safety confused with, the other. Russia might well be congratulated on having such a ruler.

But although Catherine had triumphed and was enthroned in the hearts of her subjects she was far from being what is colloquially called "out of the wood." Plots, intrigues, conspiracies, and self-seeking surrounded her. She was still far from having consolidated her power, she felt she could trust nobody. Her favourite statesman, Panin, was known to desire the corona-

tion of her son Paul, with herself as Regent, he was fathering plans for limiting her power and getting the control of the State into his own hands. The Senate was supine, void of public spirit, filled with jealousies and bickerings. The clergy were discontented, the nobility were treacherous, and the troops—well, of troops it has been said that bayonets are inconvenient things to sit on.

Difficult as Catherine's position was, in whichever direction she might turn, her domestic difficulties were perhaps the greatest of all.

Immediately on her accession she wrote a long letter to Poniatovski, from which we have quoted at some considerable length. He was the one man to whom she could pour out her heart, who would understand and appreciate her. But even of him she was afraid. She seemed to have a vivid dread, a sort of mortal fear, lest he should rush to St. Petersburg and throw himself at her feet. In writing to him she refers to Orloff in the most guarded terms. Yet it is no exaggeration to say that her whole being was, as it were, filled and possessed by this glorious, splendid guardsman, to whose devotion and courage she must, much to the disgust of Princess Dashkoff and others, ascribe her present position. But while she was devoted to this honest, simple, though dissolute soul, she was shrewd enough and clear-headed enough to know his mental limitations.

It was only natural that this brave and intrepid lover should now press for the reward which he regarded as his due. Yet Catherine knew perfectly well that the people would never consent to accept him as her recognized consort. In those days of loose ideas and lax morality they would wink at the lover but rebel against the parvenu consort. Besides, what title could he assume? To make him Emperor she was wise enough and stateswoman enough to see would be worse than folly. Besides, there was nothing in the position of favourite that could be regarded, from Catherine's point of view, as inconvenient. The Court of Russia had for over thirty years been ruled by women, and all these women had had their recognized favourites, until the word favourite had become a sort of title. Why should Catherine be an exception? Besides, Orloff was incompetent in affairs of State, and was never consulted by her in such matters.

Catherine's attempts to educate him met with most discouraging failure, yet he was very popular among his own entourage, for in spite of his great good fortune he remained a simple soldier.

Lord Cathcart thus describes him : " Count Orloff is a man gentle, humane, and accessible, and his demeanour towards his Sovereign most respectful. He is a man of very little education, but of extremely good natural parts, and the most distant possible from any sort of pretensions, which in this country is a commendation that cannot be bestowed with truth on many people. He has taken a great deal of pains, and with success, to instruct himself of late years, and having had an opportunity of talking with him one evening when he was heated with dancing and had drunk a glass more than common, I can venture to offer it as my opinion that he is a man of honour and truth, and detests and despises the least deviation from either in others."

The Earl of Buckingham, on the other hand, reports that : " Count Orloff's increasing favour occasions a discontent, which, it pains me to think, may have in the end very fatal consequences ; at present he interferes not in Foreign Affairs, but with regard to the whole of the domestic his decisions are absolute. He has lately upon him a haughtiness of behaviour, which those who remember his beginning cannot brook without an indignation not less violent for being smothered at times ; he seems to forget that respect and deference which is due to his Sovereign, and addresses Her with the air of a man who feels and means to exert the full of his influence. As far as he pays any attention to politics, he is supposed to be inclined to the House of Austria, which at this present juncture imports little, but may be of serious consequence in another year. Some of those who are near Her Imperial Majesty have hinted to me that they believe She retains still some idea of marrying him ; if She should in that instance yield to Her inclinations, She inevitably seals Her ruin."

The Earl of Buckingham never wrote a truer statement than this, but fortunately Catherine herself fully understood the position.

Perhaps nobody showed a juster appreciation of the situation or a keener insight into the character of Catherine than Lord Cathcart who, writing a few years later, said :

" The Russians in general are people of no education or



GREGORY ORLOFF

principles or knowledge of any sort, though not without quickness of parts. Some of them have great pretensions, and in such policy can never deserve a better name than cunning, which may deceive a stranger and embarrass rivals, but never will be able to conduct affairs or gain the confidence of discerning friends. I have had so many opportunities of studying the character both of the Sovereign, her Minister, and favourites that I think I can rely on the account I am going to give Your Lordship. The Empress has a quickness of thought and discernment, an attention to business and a desire to fill her throne with dignity and with utility even to the lowest of her subjects, and to the rising and future as well as present generation, which, without seeing her, it is difficult to imagine. In the various departments of business she employs various people, and, I am convinced, chooses them according to the use she finds they are capable of in their different branches. From hence arises one species of favour. But as Her Majesty finds it necessary to put her moments of leisure to the best use for the purpose of relaxation, in order to repair the fatigues of hours of business and close attention, She seeks not for amusements which engage and occupy, and are the resource of minds which are never seriously employed, but for such objects and such company as are proper, as She herself calls it, *pour la distraire*, so that those who form her society are either young people who are extremely gay, or such as are capable, from the vivacity of their disposition, to keep pace with those who are younger than themselves. From hence proceeds a second species of favour which is apt to mislead those who have had opportunities of seeing only the outside of this Court, but for those who have but a glance of the interior, appears clearly distinct and independent."

That Catherine had no intention of making a second matrimonial experiment appears very clearly from the dispatches of Count Solms to Frederick the Great, in which he alludes to the rumours spread in Constantinople by France and Austria to the effect that Catherine's object in supporting the candidature of Poniatovski for the crown of Poland was that she might marry him and thus unite the two countries under one sceptre. He indignantly denies this falsehood, as he calls it, and adds that it was even void of probability, seeing that the Empress had neither the intention nor any interest in marrying.

Nevertheless, the rumours that Catherine intended to marry Orloff were numerous and persistent.

Bilbassoff describes these rumours in his usually graphic and romantic manner. For the rest the facts are given quite as fully by Solovieff, and may be gleaned from the diplomatic dispatches of the time.

In the early part of the May of 1763, in one of the aristocratic houses of Moscow, two friends accidentally met as the guests of Princess Khilkoff—they had taken a leading part in the revolution of the 28th June of the previous year: one was the handsome Khitroff, an officer in the horse guards and an exon at Court; the other was Lassounsky, of the Ismailoff Regiment of foot guards. The following conversation took place between them:

“Have you heard of the intended marriage?” Khitroff inquired.

“What marriage?” Lassounsky rejoined.

“How is it you have not heard! I am not going to split straws with you. The Empress is about to marry Orloff.”

“I have indeed heard a rumour of that sort. But whether it is true or not I cannot tell.”

“What do you think of doing to prevent it?”

“I don’t think we can do any more than go in a body to Her Majesty and pray her to alter her intention, giving our reasons as far as possible.”

“But if our reasons are not accepted, what shall we do then?”

“In that case there would be nothing left but to bow to her will. There is nothing to be done, nor is it conceivable that anything could be done.”

“No. In that case means would have to be found to make her desist. Already the rumour is all over the town—I fear something may happen!”

“The people will do nothing, nor will anybody else.”

This was the sort of gossip which was being talked in the houses of the Muscovite nobility. A year had scarce elapsed since the accession of Catherine, and Orloff was already planning to seat himself by her side on the throne of Russia. But Catherine,

as we have seen, did not admit Orloff to any part in the administration of affairs.

Count Solms, in a dispatch to Frederick the Great, dated 18th June 1763, paints the situation in very strong colours, though he is not very accurate in all his facts. He reports that discontent with the existing Government had been manifesting itself for some time past, and he believes that he has discovered three distinct and separate grounds for dissatisfaction. The first lies in the innovations and reforms which the Empress had introduced on her accession and which were greatly needed. The governors of provinces and towns, the clergy, the judges, and the military, who had all experienced a period of laxity and ease under the anarchic regimes of Elizabeth and Peter III, were annoyed at the termination to their undisciplined, self-indulgent lives, and to the corruption, nepotism, and tyranny, by which they fattened on the land and oppressed the people. Catherine had resolutely determined to put down bribery and peculation, and although she never entirely succeeded, she nevertheless managed to introduce some semblance of order and legality in her empire, in which, hitherto, the officials had tortured and ill-treated the lower and even the mercantile classes in a most arbitrary and despotic manner for the sole purpose of their own personal gain. The worst abuses had been put a stop to, and the malefactors, deprived of their prey and thwarted in their aims, were naturally disgusted to find that the happy days of sloth and depredation were over. On the other hand, the benefits of Catherine's reforms would presently become generally felt, and the gratitude of the people and the pride of those who had shared in her glory by co-operating with her would compensate for a little discontent at present, whilst there would always remain a certain number who would cherish the hope that it would prove impossible in the end to root out all the abuses ingrained in the country, and that means of acquiring wealth without the knowledge of the Government would continue to be found. Thus matters would be so compensated and balanced that scarcely any one would venture to attack the foundations of the throne.

The second source of discontent, more to be feared, was to be found in the dissatisfaction of the principal authors of the

revolution, whom Count Solms erroneously believes to be Panin and Princess Dashkoff; of course this belief was shared by them. Count Solms says that Princess Dashkoff had attempted to interfere in the management of affairs, and, having importuned the Empress with her advice, had forfeited that monarch's favour. This the Princess resents as base ingratitude, and surrounded by wits and flatterers she receives everybody who has a grievance against the ruling powers. Count Solms regards her as a woman capable of attempting a fresh revolution simply for the fun of the thing. Count Panin, described as a person of sounder judgment, allows himself, nevertheless, to be influenced by this woman, who is reputed to be his daughter, and this leads to the suspicion that his attachment to the Empress is less strong than at the commencement of her reign. Count Solms does not appear to have been very well informed about Count Panin or he would have known how profoundly the Empress distrusted him, and what good reason she had for doing so. Solms also does not know how deep were her obligations to Bestoujeff-Ryounin, how much she had learned from him, and how he had befriended her, and had even been exiled in consequence of his friendship for her, otherwise he would not have written about him as he did, and stated that he was incapable of concentrating his mind and listening to anything that was said to him, or to make a connected speech of his own. "If one considers," he says, "that he drowns in wine and strong liquors every night the little common sense he has retained, it is incomprehensible how this senile dotard could have gained so much credit." Count Panin did not mince his words when telling Count Solms what he thought of this statesman, whom he regarded as his hated rival, but he was more guarded in his reference to Orloff, the great favour which the Empress continued to bestow on him being described as the third reason for the general discontent. Solms says that it might perhaps be possible to meet at his time of writing artisans and lackeys who had sat at the same table with Orloff in former days, but he is misinformed when he states that it was Princess Dashkoff who had introduced Orloff to the Empress. Orloff, he continues, was now loaded with honours, and lodged at the expense of the Court. His three brothers had also benefited by his good

fortune and enjoyed the benevolence and particular protection of the Empress. "At first," says Solms, "nobody raised any objections to Her Majesty's choice. People were so accustomed to favouritism in Russia, so little surprised at any sudden elevation, everybody applauded the circumstance that the choice should have fallen on a polite and gentle young man who exhibited neither pride nor vanity, and who continued to live with his old associates on the same familiar footing as before, recognizing them in a crowd, and taking no part in affairs unless it might be to use his influence on behalf of some friend or other. It would appear that his exalted protectress herself kept him away from affairs. But latterly, her feeling towards him having developed into an all-absorbing passion, she caused her favourite, in order to accustom him to public business, to form a part of the various commissions called together for reforming the government." Count Solms does not know the reason, but states that from that time the discontent with the Empress and the jealousy of Orloff seemed to date. Distinguished generals and noblemen of the highest rank were kept in Orloff's antechamber to await his awakening before being admitted to his levee. Similarly when the Empress drove out, while the high officers of State accompanied her on horseback, Orloff was seated by her side in her State coach. Solms therefore ventures to criticize the Empress, and expresses his opinion that she has gone rather far in distinguishing her favourite. One of her ladies-in-waiting has lost her favour entirely for having dared to have quarrelled with him. "In her reckless and foolhardy passion she risks everything to gratify it. . . . She seems to place herself above everything, consults her inclination only, and would appear to believe that she can afford to dispense with the approval of her subjects. The rumour has been put about that she is resolved to marry Orloff, and that she has already secured the approval of several of the leading clergy; old Bestujeff is said to have given her this baneful idea." Solms then explains how this supposed resolve had put everybody against her, and how (we must remember that his source of information is the questionable Panin) she was now regarded only as a woman devoted to pleasure and voluptuousness, who might sooner or later surrender at discretion

to a lover and hand to him the reins of government. Seeing that she had shown no gratitude to any but the Orloffs, and took into her confidence no one outside a few persons who did not enjoy public esteem, the leading nobles in the land were not interested in supporting her, the wisest and most moderate amongst them keeping away from the Court and even going abroad. All this discontent Solms thinks very dangerous, especially in view of the fact that in the Grand-Duke Paul the Empress possesses a son and a rival whose right to the throne everybody recognizes to be better founded than her own. All that was needed was some hot-headed person and there might be repeated the tragic scene which was enacted last year. Count Solms even ventures upon the following prediction: "It is certain that the reign of the Empress Catherine II, like that of the Emperor, her husband, can only make a brief apparition in the world's history."

However, Count Solms has often better information than judgment, and he concludes his dispatch by saying that he had just learned that the proposal of Bestoujeff had been rejected by Catherine, and that the veteran statesman was in disgrace.

What had really happened was this. As Catherine hesitated and evaded the importunities of Orloff, finding excuses and temporizing with him, for she scarcely felt strong enough to risk offending the Orloff brothers, to whose efforts, and not those of Panin and Princess Dashkoff, she owed her crown, Orloff instanced the marriage of the Empress Elizabeth with Count Rasoumovsky as a precedent. Catherine expressed her doubts as to the credibility of the rumoured marriage of that monarch with her favourite and dispatched an emissary to the old Count, who was living on his estates. The emissary dispatched was Count Vorontzoff, whose mission it was to inform Rasoumovsky that as he had been wedded to an Empress it was in contemplation to make him an Imperial Highness, for which reason he was to hand over to Vorontzoff any documents and authoritative proofs which he might possess.

Count Alexis Rasoumovsky was seated in an arm-chair, in front of an open fire, reading the Bible when Vorontzoff arrived and told him the true object of his visit. Rasoumovsky asked to be shown the draft decree, ran his eyes over it, rose from his

chair, walked slowly to a chest, on which there stood an ebony box embossed with silver and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Having found the key of the box in the chest, he opened the box and withdrew from a secret drawer papers wrapped in pink satin ; the satin he carefully replaced in the box, after taking out the papers, which he began to read with reverent attention. All this was done in silence. Having at length finished reading the papers he kissed them and raised his tear-stained eyes to the ikons in the corner of the room, crossing himself as he did so ; he then returned, in evident agitation, to the fireplace, at which Count Vorontzoff had remained standing, and threw the bundle of papers into the fire. Resuming his seat in his arm-chair he remained silent for a short while and then said :

“ I never was anything more than the loyal servant of the late Empress Elizabeth, who covered me with benefactions beyond my deserts. I have never forgotten from what circumstances and to what a position I was lifted by her right hand. I worshipped her as the tender loving mother of millions of people and as an exemplary Christian, and never did I dare, even in thought, to connect myself with her sovereign grandeur. I abase myself a hundredfold when thinking of the past, and live in the future, which nobody can escape, and in prayers to the Almighty. Mentally I kiss the sovereign hand of the present reigning monarch, under whose sceptre I tranquilly enjoy for the remaining days of my life the benefactions emanating from the throne to me. Had what you have been talking to me about ever been the case, believe me, Count, I would not have been vain enough to confess it, and thus at the same time to blacken the memory of a monarch who was my benefactress. You now see that I have no documents ; report on all this to her most gracious majesty, and may she extend her graciousness to me, an old man who desires no earthly honours. . . . Good-bye, Count. May all that has passed between us remain secret. Let people say what they will ; let the audacious raise their hopes to imaginary grandeurs, but do not let us give them a pretext for such talk.”

Vorontzoff reported this interview faithfully to Catherine, who was certainly well pleased with the result of her astuteness, for she knew her man and the nobility of heart and mind of Elizabeth's favourite.

The unfortunate Khitroff, whose indiscreet conversation we have reported above, was arrested and examined. Among other things he deposed that Catherine had originally intended to content herself with a regency, with her son Paul as Emperor, and that it was only in compliance with the importunate demands of the Ismailoffsky Regiment that she consented to ascend the throne. Further, he stated that it was believed to be Alexis Orloff, whom he described as a scoundrel, who had conceived the idea of marrying his brother Gregory to the Empress, and he expressed the view that if this plan succeeded it would become the duty of all right-thinking men to put the entire Orloff family to death, so as to rid the country of this dangerous brood. In spite of this frankness of speech nothing very dreadful was done to Khitroff, who was merely exiled to the estate which had been given him as a reward for his services in connection with the revolution. Another indiscreet officer, less fortunate, was incarcerated in a fortress. In all these conspiracies and confabulations it was thought that the hand of the disappointed Princess Dashkoff could be traced.

Count Gregory Orloff exposed himself to a good deal of criticism by his conversation, and it would seem to be quite unnecessary to look for any prompting from Princess Dashkoff, or any one else, if the following story, retailed by Bilbassoff, is true and can be regarded as typical. One night, as Catherine was dining with a few of her intimates, the conversation turned, as it frequently did, on the fateful 28th of June. Gregory Orloff boasted of his influence with the guards, and, turning to the Empress, swaggeringly remarked that if the whim seized him he could, in something like a month, have her deposed from the throne on which he had placed her. Rasoumovsky, the Hetman of the Cossacks, seeing how greatly this insolence displeased the Empress, called over the table to Orloff, half jokingly, half seriously: "That may be, my friend, but we would have hanged you within a fortnight!"

The indiscretions of the Orloff brothers had probably more to do with the public discontent than the jealousy of Panin or even Princess Dashkoff. Be that how it may, the scandal was great and the tongues of the loyal lieges were set a-wagging. To put an end to this unedifying state of things the Government hit

upon a strange expedient. The Empress issued an edict enjoining her subjects to refrain from scandalous talk and to keep silence. It was called the Decree of Silence; it was read in all the towns of the Empire and heralded by beat of drum, and it set the tongues wagging more than ever, because it gave, in many places, the first intelligence that anything was wrong.

There was, of course, nothing against Catherine's marrying again. From a political point of view it was neither undesirable nor necessary. Paul was certainly a puny child, but he was there, and while he was alive the succession was assured. A second marriage might result in further children or might not, in any case there was no public anxiety in this respect. But what the entire nation seemed to have set its face against was that Orloff should be raised to the throne, for that, it was felt, would be the inevitable consequence of his marrying the Empress. Many thought that if Catherine could see her way to marry the deposed and incarcerated Ivan, that would be a most welcome solution of a difficult problem. We shall see presently how impracticable such a course would have been. However, Catherine did not marry; she was too wise to put herself absolutely in the power of the Orloffs, and too fond of Gregory to marry anybody else.

If she did not marry him, he at least did not seem to regard so small a trifle as an official recognition and a religious ceremony as of much consequence. Béranger, the French chargé d'affaires, writing about Orloff, says that it was but the name of Emperor which he lacked, that his easy manners with the Empress astonished everybody—such behaviour had never been seen in Russia since the existence of the monarchy. He took liberties with her in public which no self-respecting mistress would allow her lover to take. It was even confidently asserted that he had dared to thrash her. No evidence of the truth of this last allegation, however, exists, and it may be dismissed as improbable.

Nevertheless, no mistress could have been more devoted, more afraid of displeasing her lover, or more complaisant. Writing to Mme Geoffrin she tells how Orloff had read a letter from her correspondent praising her for being so industrious, and had exclaimed: "Yes! that is true!" and adds: "This is the first time that I heard any praises from his lips, and that I owe to

you ! ” She winked at his numerous infidelities, which he took but little pains to conceal, and covered him with honours and benefactions. Henry Shirley said that the Orloffs were allowed to dive into the privy purse of Her Majesty at their will and pleasure. “ Not a week passes without the one or the other receiving sometimes five sometimes ten thousand roubles, which they divide equally, the greatest cordiality and friendship subsisting between the five brothers.” With regard to Gregory it is, however, only fair to add that Shirley writes to Lord Weymouth to say : “ Count Orloff, satisfied with playing with magnificence and splendour the part of the favourite, would not think of anything else, but pass his time as agreeably as possible, and would never interfere in any one thing, was it not for his brothers, who, at the desire even of the Empress, oblige him to recommend to her their friends.”

Indeed, the Empress did all she could to educate her handsome paramour, both by conversation and books, and stimulate his lethargy by giving him all sorts of offices, and even making him take part in the debates of the Senate. But all to no purpose, his good-natured laziness was proof against all her efforts. He was made Chief of Engineers, Master-General of Ordnance, Director of Fortifications, Chief of the Colonization Department, and neglected his duties in all these posts with laudable impartiality. When he opened his mouth in the Senate his fatuous ignorance brought blushes to his mistress’s cheek. He was a poor debater, and when contradicted lost his temper and gave vent to his feelings by vigorous swearing, and yet he appears to have been a most lovable person and universally popular.

Such money as he did not fritter away he refunded to his mistress, who built him a marble palace with the inscription : “ Erected in grateful friendship,” and allowed him Rs.10,000 a month pocket-money.

It is not surprising that the affection of so lively and so intellectual a woman as Catherine for this illiterate giant, whom she nevertheless insisted on describing as a genius, should gradually wane. His mind was unable to respond to hers, and she must have frequently found him a most tiresome and disappointing companion. Indeed, it is safe to assume that there

was a strong element of fear in her devotion, for the brothers Orloff, who were believed to have the entire army behind them, and had placed her on the throne, presented a solid phalanx. But as time went on Catherine felt surer of her position and was less disposed to be dominated by what was, after all, but a clique of needy adventurers. We have seen that in 1768 Henry Shirley was able to report that the Empress of Russia understood the proper manner of governing her subjects much better than could have been expected from a foreign princess, and that the crown was now so firmly settled on her head that he could not foresee any accident capable of obliging her to place it on that of her son.

But it was not until quite three years later that Orloff began to feel that all was not well with him, and that he must pull himself together and do some heroic deed in order to maintain his position. An opportunity at once presented itself. The plague was raging in Moscow, and lamentable riots had broken out among the inhabitants. Orloff set off for Moscow charged with a mission which, as Waliszewski justly observes, made him a hero and the saviour of his country in actual fact and not merely in the complaisant imagination of Catherine. Waliszewski suggests that she was all the more disposed to let him go, because she had been casting admiring glances on a certain obscure person of the name Vysoki.

Be this as it may, Orloff went and triumphed with indomitable energy. He suppressed the nascent rebellion and conquered the even more terrible plague. He did more. On his return he recaptured the volatile affections of his imperial innamorata. She compared him to the ancient Romans, erected a marble triumphal arch, which is still standing, in his honour, and had a commemorative medal struck bearing the legend: "Russia has also such sons." Catherine had originally intended the inscription to bear the words "such a son," but the modesty of the simple soldier prevailed. Not content with this achievement he got himself dispatched to the seat of war to negotiate the terms of peace with the Turks. Catherine, writing to Mme Bielke, describes him as the handsomest man of his time, who must appear as a veritable angel of peace to the barbarous Turks, and adds: "It is such a remarkable personage, this ambassador ;

nature has been so extraordinarily liberal to him in respect of his appearance, his mind, his heart, and his soul ! ”

But instead of being an angel of peace Orloff had the mad idea of seizing Constantinople. A friendly warning, however, reached him intimating that he had lost all. He had been supplanted by Vassiltchikoff.

Count Solms, writing to Frederick the Great, informs him that “ the absence of Count Gregory Orloff has an effect which is in truth very natural, but nevertheless unexpected, namely, that Her Majesty has learned to do without, has changed her sentiments towards, him, and has conferred her favour on another. A lieutenant in the Horse Guards, called Vassiltchikoff, whom accident had sent to Tzarskoe Selo this spring to command a small detachment, was on duty while the Court was there, and attracted the attention of his Sovereign without at first arousing any suspicion. . . . ” He says he is not a man of distinguished appearance, nor had he ever done anything to attract attention, and, moreover, that he was little known in society. The Empress sent him, as a first mark of her favour, a gold box for having kept his men in such good order. Moreover, she had displayed great assiduity in showing him favour, and had manifested a gaiety and brightness which had been foreign to her since the departure of Orloff. The latter appeared to have offended the Empress by the alacrity with which he left for the front, and the boredom which he had exhibited in her society for some years past. Panin and the other entourage of the Empress had not thought it necessary to disabuse her mind of the idea that Orloff was a person unworthy of the benefits bestowed upon him.

In a later letter Count Solms thus describes Vassiltchikoff, whose acquaintance he had just made : “ He is a man of medium height, about twenty-eight years of age, dark, and with fairly good features. He has always been very polite to everybody, and his manners are gentle, but he is very shy. . . . He appears to be embarrassed by the rôle he has to play and not yet to have realized his good fortune.” At first the affair was kept so secret that Ivan Orloff, the eldest brother, knew nothing about it. Count Solms draws an amusing picture of the despondency among the minor courtiers and servants, all creatures of the Orloffs.

Travelling post-haste Gregory Orloff returned, but was not allowed to proceed farther than Moscow, where he was put in quarantine. Asked by the Empress to return her the miniature of herself set in brilliants which she had given him, he returned the brilliants but refused to part with the portrait. However, he succeeded later in coming back, apparently in all his old splendour, but to the surprise of the Court he made a friend and boon companion of Vassiltchikoff, and was seen about with him in resorts of a low character and in questionable company.

In the beginning of 1773 he disappeared, and towards the end of the winter turned up at Reval, where he behaved with his usual extravagance, making love to all the ladies, disporting himself like a royal person, conferring the riband of St. Anne on Count Tiesenhausen, and presenting Crown domains to a prince of the house of Holstein. Raised to the rank of Prince, he returned to St. Petersburg and began to show signs of softening of the brain, and appeared incapable of performing the simplest military duties.

It was about this time that Catherine wrote : " I am under great obligations to the Orloff family ; I have piled benefactions and honours upon them ; I shall always befriend them, and they may be useful to me, but I have made up my mind. I have suffered for eleven years. I now desire to live after my own fancy, and in absolute independence. As to the Prince, he may do what he pleases ; he is at liberty to travel or to remain in the empire, to drink, to hunt, to have mistresses. . . . If he conducts himself well he will cover himself with honour, if he conducts himself badly he will cover himself with disgrace."

For all that, and despite his ostentatious profligacy and the continued favour of Vassiltchikoff, Orloff's star remained in the ascendant. He was actually believed to have had the audacity to meditate an alliance with one of those Hesse-Darmstadt princesses who had been brought by their mother to St. Petersburg as candidates for the hand of the Grand-Duke Paul, and whom the Empress received at Orloff's palace at Gatchina. His vagrant fancy was, however, incapable of persistency, and his attentions were too soon fixed elsewhere. Shortly afterwards, the redoubtable Potemkin, supplanting Vassiltchikoff, Orloff went abroad and visited the Courts of Europe, where he does not

appear to have impressed observers with his brains. On his return he still found in the Empress an appreciative friend who regarded him as a man of great natural genius. In 1777, however, he finally cut himself adrift by forming, at the age of forty-three, a romantic attachment for one of the young ladies-in-waiting to the Empress, a Mlle Zinovieff, his cousin-german, for whom this debauchee conceived a pure and honourable passion, and whom he insisted on marrying, in spite of the Orthodox Church, which will not countenance the marriage of cousins. The complaisant Catherine overruled the objections of the Church, and Orloff became the devoted and faithful husband of this girl of nineteen. Their happiness was complete, but, unfortunately, of short duration. The young wife, who lived near Moscow with her husband, and was now rarely seen at Court, soon developed consumption, and after trying every possible cure, died at Lausanne in 1782. The unhappy Orloff now completely went off his head, suffered from hallucinations, and finally died at Moscow in 1783. Writing about this death, which had been preceded by that of his old enemy, Count Panin, Catherine says to her *souffre-douleur*, Grimm :

“ Although prepared for this event, so painful to me, I must confess to you that it has afflicted me intensely ; I have lost in him the man of all in this world to whom I was under the greatest obligations and who had rendered me the most essential services. One may tell me, and I tell myself, all that can be said in such circumstances, sobs and tears are my reply, and I suffer terribly since receiving the fatal news. Work is my only distraction, and as I have no more papers I am writing to you to console myself. . . . There is something singular in this decease of Prince Orloff, namely, Count Panin died a fortnight before, and neither of them knew of the death of the other. These two men, always of opposite opinion, and not loving each other at all, must have been very much surprised to meet in the other world. Fire and water afford no greater contrast ; I had these two advisers hung at my ears for a good many years. . . . The genius of Prince Orloff was vast ; his courage was, I think, the *non plus ultra* of courage ; at the decisive moment there came precisely to his mind what was needed to settle the matter in the sense desired, and at the right moment he displayed, when necessary, an eloquence

which nobody could resist, for he kept the minds of others in suspense, while he never hesitated. With these great qualities he showed but little interest in things which he did not deem worthy of his attention, and few matters seemed to deserve that honour, or rather the trouble, for it was a trouble to him, hence he appeared negligent and disdainful to a greater extent than he really was. Nature had spoilt him, and he grew indolent towards everything that did not enter his brain instantaneously. Count Panin was naturally indolent, yet he had the art to make this indolence pass for premeditated caution; his disposition was neither so kindly nor so frank as that of Prince Orloff, but he was more of a man of the world, and knew better how to hide his deficiencies and his vices, and he had great vices."

Thus the last words of the great Empress to her confidential correspondent regarding Orloff were kindly, appreciative, and full of recognition. Indeed, it was a grand trait in the character of this truly great woman, that with all her human frailties, absurd vanity, and other faults, she was never petty, and never cherished vindictive feelings against the many people who thwarted, intrigued against and worried her generally; the height of her vengeance seems to have been to indulge in a little cheap satire at their expense in her confidential letters to her philosopher friends.

Gregory Orloff was, however, an exceptional man, and though he did repay his Empress's favour by being unfaithful to her, fidelity of that kind was not his to command, and he was at least her most loyal subject and devoted friend. He was, moreover, a man of strong impulses, which, greatly to his credit, were mostly generous and noble. If he was deficient in the moral sense, this deprivation was not peculiar to himself but was, on the contrary, fairly general. At any rate he did not indulge in secret vices which he repudiated in public, like Panin, for instance, and perhaps he may be regarded as having atoned for his extravagances by his later happy marriage. Like the bulk of Catherine's favourites his influence on the State was at least not baneful. He was no Biren—nor would Catherine have tolerated cruelties of that kind. An honest, simple, gallant soldier, Gregory Orloff, while doing harm to nobody, and possessed of the broadest charity even towards his rivals, enjoyed himself and his good fortune to

the full. Moreover, he retained the affections of Catherine to the end, in spite of his infidelities and tempers.

There was, however, another Orloff—Alexis—who was regarded as the malignant intriguer of the family, of whom Catherine was said to be really afraid. One night this fierce brother of the favourite is reported to have violently forced his way into the Empress's bedchamber. Of this adventure Prince Bobrinski was believed to be the result. Alexis Orloff's famous performances in the Mediterranean and his capture by a ruse of the unfortunate and beautiful impostor, Princess Tarakanoff, require no further reference. After many campaigns he retired in umbrage and sulked in Moscow, and on the accession of Paul, he, the assassin of Peter III, had to follow the coffin containing the mortal remains of that monarch, which his reverential son had reburied after thirty-four years. Alexis died in 1808. He was as much hated as Gregory was liked, and is described by Durand as a forceful man without heart, incapable of conceiving of himself any great project, and still less of carrying it out. Princess Dashkoff is made by Diderot to call him "the greatest scoundrel on earth." Of the other brothers there is little to record.

Henry Shirley, in a dispatch to Lord Weymouth, reports that Catherine's "only confidence is placed in Mr. Orloff's family. She looks upon their interests as Her own, and She endeavours to make them the only channels of distribution of all places, either civil or military."

CHAPTER XIV

IVAN III

WHEN Catherine ascended the throne she found, as she said, the empire in the following condition: "The burdensome war with Prussia had been ended by a peace by means of which Russia obtained no advantages beyond tranquillity. On the 28th June 1762 the army was still abroad and had received no pay for eight months. The fleet was neglected, the land forces disorganized, the fortresses falling in ruins. The Treasury had seventeen millions (of roubles) of debts. There was a complete absence of confidence in the State. There was not a single individual in the realm who knew what the revenues of the State were, or even knew how to describe the various sources of such revenues. No proper budget had been prepared. Nearly every branch of commerce had been farmed to private individuals. About two hundred thousand miners and labourers on ecclesiastical estates were in open revolt; the serfs of country gentlemen refused obedience to their masters in many places, and did not pay them their feus. Justice was put up to auction. Cruel tortures and punishments indifferently administered in respect of trivial offences and serious crimes alike embittered the minds of all. From all parts the people complained of extortion, bribery, oppression, and injustice. The political situation was such that we expected, in addition to all this, the arrival of the Tartars in the spring."

Another unsettling feature existed, however, to which Catherine did not allude, and that was the circumstance, never before experienced in Russia, that at the time when she ascended the throne there were three monarchs contemporaneously living in the country. There was herself, there was her husband,

and there was Ivan III, the unfortunate youth who had been deposed as an infant. It is with this unhappy prince that we now have to deal.

From 1744 to 1756 this prince lived at Kholmogor in ignorance of the fact that his father was living but a few yards from his own abode. In 1756 he was taken by night, and under the greatest secrecy and unbeknown to his father, to the Schlüsselburg fortress. Notwithstanding the most stringent precautions, the secret of the removal of "Prince Ivan" was soon known all over the countryside, and a village maiden who travelled from Archangel to St. Petersburg published the story far and wide. In St. Petersburg this poor girl was arrested and "examined" by Count Shouvaloff, who ascertained from her that the "unknown prisoners" were barefooted and starved, that the ceilings in their residence were dilapidated and threatened to fall in, and that the officer in charge of them was always drunk and "perpetrated the greatest disorders."

Arrived at Schlüsselburg the prince was given into the custody of Captain Shoubin of the guards. The instructions received by this officer from Count Shouvaloff included the following: "The place in which the prisoner is situated, and whether it is near St. Petersburg or near Moscow shall not be told him in order that he may not know." Nobody was to be told who visited the prisoner, nor should any information be given to anybody regarding the age or nationality of the prisoner. Any indiscretion on behalf of the captain or his command to be punished by death. Ivan III never saw any one nor was seen by any one. The captain, an ensign, and a sergeant were the only persons allowed to see and attend on him, and even then the prisoner was to retire behind a screen while his room was being cleaned.

In 1757 Shoubin fell ill, and his successor received still more stringent instructions not to allow anybody to have access to the Prince.

Thus Prince Ivan Antonovitch, the legitimate Emperor of Russia, spent eighteen terrible years—twelve at Kholmogor and six in Schlüsselburg—during the reign of the Empress Elizabeth. He was subjected to every indignity, and suffered privations and ill-treatment, but it may at least be said in favour of

Elizabeth that this treatment was carried out without her knowledge, and in many particulars against her instructions. But on the accession of the inhuman Peter III all these cruelties received official sanction and were even aggravated. Count Shouvaloff now wrote to the Prince's keeper: "Should the prisoner behave in a disorderly manner, or be insubordinate to you, or speak improperly, he shall be chained up until he is submissive; but should he be disobedient even then, he shall be beaten with a stick or plait (knout) at your discretion."

Peter III himself wrote to the keeper instructing him that in the event of any attempt at rescue, the prisoner was not to be allowed to be taken alive. It was indeed fortunate for Prince Ivan that Peter's reign did not last more than six months. On the day after the accession of Catherine she issued an order for the removal of the "nameless prisoner" from Schlüsselburg to a place near the Lake of Ladoga. In the August of the same year he was, however, brought back to the fortress, where Catherine went to see him and formed the opinion that he was an imbecile. Considering his bringing up, and the terrible childhood and youth he had experienced, it would indeed have been strange had he been able to retain his reason.

Ivan III, or VI, was twenty-two when Catherine set eyes on him. He was a youth of medium height, with a delicate frame and an exceptionally fair skin, due to the fact that he had spent his life in confinement and had never been brought in contact with fresh air. He grew his beard and was proud of it. In all the reports from persons appointed to be his custodians the stereotyped phrase, "The prisoner is well," is repeatedly encountered, and no mention is made of any signs of disease or of any physical disabilities, except that he had an impediment in his speech, although this affliction, mentioned by Catherine and others, was not noticed by Peter III and his suite, who visited him in 1762. That he was weak in intellect seems to be beyond question, everything had been against him from his earliest days. He had been taken from the custody of his father, his mother, and relatives at the age of four and handed over to the tender care of gaolers. He had been kept for twenty years in solitary confinement. He saw nobody, nobody held conversation with him, for it was prohibited to

reply to his questions. When he was visited by Peter III, Keith said that the prisoner was found to be in a state of imbecility, and Korff, in his report of the interview, stated that the Prince was confused in his speech. The reports of his keepers show him to be constantly hearing voices whispering in his ear, and represent him as being of an irritable temper, for which reason he appears to have been frequently teased, when he would fly into a passion, call his tormentors names, threaten to thrash them, and inform them that he was their lord and emperor. He had received no education, although he had been taught to read as a child, and was well acquainted with the Gospels. At twenty-four he was, however, little better than a child, from the point of view of mental development, and possessed a fierce and passionate temper and was intolerant of contradiction. Still, he could not be described as mad.

The commandant of the fortress of Schlüsselburg, although he might well suspect, had no means of knowing who his "nameless prisoner" might be. The instructions given him were sufficiently strict, yet in their definition of the identity of the prisoner their vagueness left everything to the imagination. "The prisoner," it is said, "although in himself of but little importance, shall be kept in secret confinement for a certain time." In the event of sickness, no doctor was to attend the prisoner without the special sanction of Count Panin. The Empress evidently still entertained a hope that Ivan might yet be induced to become a monk, a project which it is said she had mooted on the occasion of her interview with him, but which he had very firmly rejected. His warders were now instructed to converse with their prisoner on religious subjects, and to tell him that the solitary life he had hitherto led had marked him out for the monastery. Unfortunately the two infantry officers selected to instil these lofty and pious ideals were hardly the most suitable instruments that could have possibly been found.

Peter III had ordered that the prisoner was not to be given up alive to rescuers. Catherine's instructions were less ambiguous. She plainly stated that, in the event of any attempt at a liberation of the prisoner in such force as to make a defence impossible, he was to be put to death. Some writers have made

much of this, but, after all, the difference is one of words and not of intention. Everything points to the earnest desire of Catherine to have the inconvenient question of the existence of a rival Emperor settled happily and satisfactorily by inducing him to don the garb of a monk. That would indeed have been the simplest solution. The idea of a marriage, which had been advocated or hinted at by some, between the two rivals, Catherine felt to be absolutely out of the question, nor would such a solution have been entirely devoid of risk.

In this humane, not ungenerous, but eminently prudent and cautious spirit, Catherine dispatched a messenger to the unfortunate father of Ivan, Prince Anthony Ulrich, to inform him of her desire to set him free and to allow him to proceed to his own country, where suitable provision would be made for him, but explaining that for reasons of State, which he could easily understand, she could not grant the same liberty to his children until she more permanently established order and good government in her realm. These overtures were, however, curtly rejected, and Prince Anthony Ulrich is said to have committed the further indiscretion of speaking in eulogistic terms of his eldest daughter. The long confinement amid inhospitable surroundings, and the hardships and ill-usage he had experienced, had indeed affected his mind.

In the meantime the warders were getting very sick of their unpleasant duty and were constantly importuning Count Panin to be released of their office. To these requests Count Panin replied in the August of 1763, exhorting them to be patient for yet a little while, assuring them that their services would not be unrewarded, and that they would soon be relieved of their duty. In the following November they again beg to be relieved, and are told to bide their time till the early summer.

These letters have been interpreted as having a sinister significance, in view of what happened so shortly afterwards. Yet on the face of it there is nothing extraordinary in such a promise. Catherine, as we have seen, had strong hopes of inducing Ivan to become a monk. There are no orders in the Greek Orthodox Church, and it is quite conceivable that, had this plan failed, she would have found in her fertile brain, so rarely at a loss for an expedient, some other means of settling this difficult

question, such, for instance, as exile to some remote and sparsely inhabited part of her empire.

Ever since it had become known that Ivan was at Schlüsselburg all sorts of strange rumours got afloat about him, and now these rumours gained in volume and persistency. Meanwhile Catherine had gone to visit the Baltic Provinces of the empire. In the April of 1764, in Holy Week, anonymous letters were picked up in the streets of St. Petersburg to the effect that as soon as Ivan should, by the grace of God, ascend the throne, the Orloffs and others would be drawn and quartered, the Empress sent back to her own country, and the legitimate ruler of Russia firmly established.

Catherine described these seditious papers as being worthy only of contempt. The early summer months passed by and the warders of Ivan III were still waiting to be relieved. Their relief was to come in an unexpected manner.

In 1709, after the battle of Poltava, the remaining representatives of Separatism in the Oukrain, or steppes, fled with Mazeppa. Amongst them was one, Feodor Mirovitch, the son of a colonel.

By order of Peter the Great all the relatives of these traitors were dispatched to Moscow in 1712, and amongst them the two sons, Jacob and Peter, of the fugitive Mirovitch. These two boys had to suffer many hardships, having forfeited their estates, but remained inseparable in adversity as they had been attached to each other in the days of their prosperity. Peter became secretary to the then Princess Elizabeth, and Jacob, after having been secretary to the Polish Ambassador, Count Pototski, and having secretly visited Poland, married a woman of the merchant class in Moscow. In 1732 both brothers were exiled to Siberia for having travelled secretly, the one to Poland the other to Podolia. In Siberia a son, Basil, was born to Jacob. In 1742 the two brothers were recalled and given appointments, but Jacob died shortly afterwards and his son Basil arrived in St. Petersburg and joined an infantry regiment. Without money, influence, or education, the unhappy young Mirovitch had to suffer much in St. Petersburg. His ancestry and antecedents inspired but little confidence. He made efforts to obtain the restoration of his family estates, and even carried his petition

as far as the Senate, but without avail. His sisters wrote to him from Moscow asking for assistance, when he himself was half-starved, wandering about the streets of St. Petersburg, dreaming of the departed glories of his house, and scarcely knowing where to lay his head.

On the accession of Catherine young Mirovitch was twenty-two. He saw how easily the revolution was brought about, how people, yesterday of no importance, were to-day loaded with wealth and honours. He had been an aide-de-camp to Count Panin, and in his antechamber he heard the most incredible stories of the good fortune of others. He appealed to his countryman, Count Rasoumovsky, the Hetman of the Cossacks, and asked him to help him to get back at least a portion of his patrimony. The reply he received from the wily Cossack chief was not encouraging: "The dead," he said, "cannot be recalled from the grave. Thou art young; make thine own way. Endeavour to emulate the example of others, try to seize Fortune by the forelock, and thou wilt become as great as any of them."

Such advice was more easy to give than to follow. Poor Mirovitch's only asset was his ambition; moreover, he was intensely sensitive and touchy. It was gall and wormwood to him to think that he, a Mirovitch, was treated no better than any ordinary obscure subaltern, that he had no access to the Empress. He denied himself everything and made a vow that he would build a church if he regained his estates.

Mirovitch's regiment was in garrison at Schlüsselburg, and he was not infrequently on guard at the fortress. Stories concerning the "nameless prisoner" aroused his curiosity. In the October of 1763 a retired drummer disclosed to him the identity of this "nameless prisoner," and told him he was the former Emperor of All the Russias, Ivan III. To Mirovitch, whose perfervid imagination had become somewhat morbid, this information sounded like a message of good comfort and high promise. Here was his opportunity to seize Fortune by the forelock and make his own way! It was all so obvious and so easy. He had but to liberate Ivan III and reinstate him on the throne, and all his debts would be paid; he would be rich and powerful, all his troubles would be over, and if he should fail in his attempt,

why, he had nothing to lose, and he could not be made more miserable than he was.

The mad project to liberate the "nameless prisoner" became a sort of fixed idea. It haunted him for six months, and the more he turned it over in his mind the more feasible did it seem to become. At last he determined to carry out his design, but, uncultured and self-centred as he was, he felt that so desperate an enterprise could hardly be carried to a successful issue by himself alone, and so he proceeded to look about for confederates. Mirovitch had scarcely any friends, but he had a chum in whom he trusted, a certain Lieutenant Apollo Oushakoff, and to him he unburdened his soul. Oushakoff was at first simply terrified at the idea of such an enterprise, but allowed himself to be gradually persuaded by his friend to join him in his conspiracy. They thereupon exchanged vows in the Kazan Cathedral, and Mirovitch set to work to prepare the following documents: 1. A decree from the Empress ordering the arrest of the commandant of the fortress and his immediate conveyance, in company with Ivan Antonovitch (Ivan III), to the Senate. 2. A letter jointly signed by Mirovitch and Oushakoff, addressed to Ivan III and informing him in high-flown language of their determination to liberate him. 3. A manifesto from Ivan III to his people. 4. A form of oath of allegiance.

Oushakoff was not destined, however, to be of much assistance to Mirovitch; he was sent off on a short military mission and got drowned. Mirovitch then approached a lackey of the Court, but this flunkey, though apparently very discontented with the existing order of things, had no stomach for such an undertaking. Equally unsuccessful were his attempts to enlist the sympathies of some of his military boon companions. These honest fellows distrusted him, even in their cups, and would not listen to any talk about Ivan III.

Meanwhile time was passing. Catherine left for the Baltic on the 20th June, and if Mirovitch was to accomplish his object during her absence he must act at once, and, consequently, act alone.

He succeeded in getting himself appointed on guard, out of his turn, for the 3rd July 1764, a Saturday.

The Court, which investigated the incident, was unable to

ascertain how Mirovitch spent that day, but obtained a complete record of his movements during Sunday the 4th July. On the morning of that day there arrived at the fortress the four friends of the commandant, who attended divine service and stayed to dinner, at which Mirovitch was also present. They were shown round the fortress by the commandant and Mirovitch before leaving, and appeared to have had an interesting conversation with the latter concerning the famous prisoner. Just after they had departed the commandant noticed that Mirovitch was walking about the fortress, this was between four and five in the afternoon. Meeting Captain Vlassieff, the officer in charge of Ivan III, he unfolded his schemes of liberation to him, and asked him his opinion. Vlassieff evidently did not take Mirovitch very seriously and declined to continue the conversation. Undaunted by this failure to secure a confederate in Vlassieff, the half-witted Mirovitch, for he must have been bereft of his senses to have acted as he did, proceeded to make out a decree in the name of Ivan III, calling on the colonel of the Smolenski Regiment to accompany him with his troops to the Summer Palace of the Empress. The Smolenski Regiment was his own regiment and probably the only one he knew anything about, but it is curious that neither the colonel nor any of the officers nor men appear to have been in the plot, literally a one-man conspiracy. He then summoned one by one the men under his command, and took them into his confidence, obtaining their promise to assist him in his foolhardy attempt. These men all deposed that they gave their consent without serious intention but simply by way of pacifying their commanding officer. Everything points to the probability that Mirovitch was drunk, more especially the deposition of one of the commandant's guests, with whom Mirovitch had had a somewhat strange conversation concerning Ivan III, and who excused himself from having reported the same by the admission that he had partaken very freely of the vodka provided by his host, and was laid up next day from the effects of his imprudence. Having, as he thought, secured the support of his men, Mirovitch now went to bed. At one o'clock he was informed the commandant had ordered some boatmen to be let out of the fortress, without disturbing Mirovitch; half an hour later he was informed that a clerk and some boatmen had been ordered to be admitted,

and a few minutes later these boatmen were ordered to be allowed to return. These mysterious arrivals and departures in the night excited the suspicions of Mirovitch, who suddenly formed the resolution that he must act now or never. Throwing on his clothes, and in disordered attire, he marched into the guard-house and summoned his men. These were distributed in various places, and when they had been collected he ordered them to load their muskets, and dispatched a corporal and a private to guard the postern and admit nobody. The commandant, aroused by the noise, arrived in his dressing-gown to know the cause of the commotion, but was knocked on the head with the butt-end of a musket by Mirovitch, and given into custody.

Mirovitch now marched his men to the barracks in the citadel and called on the garrison to surrender ; they replied by opening fire on him. He thereupon brought up his only six-pounder, and ran himself into the stores to find the ammunition. He was very loath to fire his gun, as he did not know whether a cannon-ball might not kill the very person whose liberation he desired to effect. While he was ordering the gun to be loaded he therefore dispatched one of his men to call on the garrison to leave off firing. To his intense surprise he received a message that the firing would cease. Delighted with the success which had so far attended his enterprise he proceeded to the barracks, seized a lieutenant and asked him where the Emperor was incarcerated. " We have no Emperor," was the sullen reply, " only an Empress." " You scoundrel ! " said Mirovitch. " Open the door and take me to the Emperor, or I shall run you through ! " It was dark, light had to be obtained, and at last the dark prison stairs were scaled and Mirovitch was shown into the prison cell of Ivan Antonovitch, whose dead but warm body was lying in a pool of blood on the floor, while his two gaolers, who had scrupulously carried out their written instructions, stood glaring at the horror-stricken and half-demented would-be liberator.

What had happened it is difficult to say. The gaolers, no doubt glad at the prospect of deliverance from their irksome duty, had carried out their orders, although in their depositions no details are given. The accounts given by the various foreign diplomatists are virtually identical, but whence they got their facts is not stated. The Earl of Buckingham writes :

"The first stab awakened the unfortunate youth, who was asleep in bed. He made so stout a resistance as to break one of their swords, and received eight wounds before he expired."

Mirovitch fell on his knees and kissed the hands and feet of the corpse. He then caused it to be placed on the bed and carried out into the courtyard or square, near the gates, where he ordered his men to form a square round the body and fire salutes, after which the drummers beat the assault. The *réveillé* having been sounded, Mirovitch embraced the corpse, and addressing the men told them, this was their Emperor Ivan, adding that they were blameless in what had occurred, and that he would bear all the consequences. He seemed to have been completely at a loss as to what to do, and commenced to embrace his men in an hysterical manner, when a corporal caught him from behind and tried to seize his sword; but Mirovitch refused to give this up to any one other than the commandant. The latter shortly arriving on the scene, took his sword from him, tore off his badges and distinguishing marks, and put the "mutineer" under arrest.

It is evident that Mirovitch, a man of splendid, even heroic, courage, must have been a person of weak intellect, whatever theory be adopted. Whether he was the blind instrument of exalted intriguers, or, what is far more probable, a fanatic who had the insane idea of advancing himself and making his fortune by a *coup*, that he was half-witted seems obvious. Of course, in those days, palace revolutions were familiar to the imagination. Elizabeth had owed her crown to her guards, and the same was true of Catherine. It is therefore not in the least surprising that others should have had a similar idea. What is astounding is the foolhardiness of such a mutiny of one. The idea that one man could possibly succeed in an enterprise of so grave and complicated a nature, involving so many ramifications, seems almost incredible. Nevertheless all the evidence collected about Mirovitch shows him to have been a person of low intelligence, practically without education or culture, greedy, needy, and reckless.

Panin, in reporting the incident to Catherine, assured her that there was no question of any extensive plot, but that it was simply a desperate *coup*, and later he wrote to say that the papers of Mirovitch, which had been seized, betrayed nothing but fanaticism bordering on madness.

Catherine was deeply affected, more, it is said by her Russian biographers, than on any other occasion. Writing to Panin she piously recognizes the hand of Providence in all, but she nevertheless decided to return to her capital as speedily as she could, in order to be prepared for all contingencies. The silly manifesto of Mirovitch, in which she was accused of exporting money to Germany, of having poisoned her husband, and of intending to marry Orloff, exercised her greatly. After all, Catherine was a woman, and attached a greater importance to such matters, which should have been beneath her notice, than she liked to admit, or students of her life suppose.

In St. Petersburg every precaution was taken, troops were kept under arms, hussars patrolled the streets, and certain fusilier regiments had ball-cartridges served out to them in order to overawe the guards. Nothing, however, happened.

Lieutenant General Hans von Weymarn conducted the preliminary examination in the case with commendable dispatch, meticulous care, and lofty impartiality, exhibiting, moreover, much kindness of heart, for he recommended to mercy the private soldiers, who, as he put it, had acted from native stupidity and not from malicious intent.

On Catherine's return she expressed herself well pleased with Weymarn, and referred the trial of the case to the Senate, with power to constitute a special supreme court for the purpose. This supreme court was duly constituted and consisted of forty-eight persons, five of the higher clergy and forty-three civil and military notabilities. Mirovitch's demeanour before this court was confident and self-reliant, moreover, he refused to incriminate any one, but took the whole blame, and the whole glory, of his escapade on himself. His insolence so exasperated the ecclesiastical members of the court that they urged upon Baron Tcherkassoff to have him questioned by torture, but to this Catherine would not agree.

After considerable discussions and somewhat unseemly episodes, the supreme court passed sentence on Mirovitch and his so-called accomplices. Mirovitch was condemned to be beheaded, and his body to be exposed to the public until the evening, when it was to be burnt, together with the scaffold on which the execution had taken place.

The corporals, Krenaff, Ossipoff, and Mirouoff, and the privates, Piskloff, Bossoff, and Dityaleff, were sentenced to run the gauntlet of 1000 men—Piskloff twelve times, the others ten times each, and after completion of this punishment to penal servitude for life.

A drummer, fifer, and thirty-six men of the Smolenski Infantry Regiment to run the gauntlet of 1000 men—four, to be selected by lot, ten times, and others five times, but all to serve subsequently in outlying military districts for life without promotion.

Ten soldiers of the same regiments to serve for life in outlying military districts, without promotion.

The same sentence was passed on one corporal of artillery and four gunners. The lackey Kossatkin to be flogged and sent to serve as a private in a distant military district.

Sub-Lieutenant Prince Tchefaridzéeff, the officer who had partaken too freely of the commandant's hospitality, was sentenced to the loss of his rank and position, to six months' imprisonment in a fortress, and to serve afterwards as a private soldier in an outlying district.

Various other suspected persons were acquitted.

It is recorded that Mirovitch met his fate with dignity and composure, others maintain that he expected a pardon up to the last moment, whilst Helbig states that he laughed when he heard his sentence, laughed on the way to the scaffold, and continued laughing when, instead of the expected reprieve, the executioner cut off his head.

Everything seems to point to his having been not far removed from a lunatic. Indeed, no sane man could have behaved as he did.

The death of Ivan III was so opportune, and so conveniently removed Catherine's only remaining rival, that an uncharitable world regarded his death as a political murder instigated by her. Perhaps if this had been really the case it would have been an act of charity to Ivan, for his life was, after all, little better than a living death. However, in a scandal-loving Court ominous rumours and stories were put about; these reached the willing ears of certain foreign diplomatic residents, who assiduously reported them to their respective Governments, and presently

there was a perfect outcry against Catherine throughout Western Europe, and public opinion in England, France, and Germany unanimously condemned this cruel outrage against humanity. Voltaire even expressed his fears for his Empress and his apprehension that the murdered Ivan might dethrone his benefactress, whilst Frederick II wondered whether Catherine might not in consequence be compelled to marry Orloff.

But a calm survey of the facts, as reproduced above, for which we are indebted to Bilbassoff's admirable biography (by no means a partisan), must make it clear that Catherine could not have instigated this crime. The half-witted Mirovitch, with his open and unconcealed hatred of Catherine, his limited circle, his poverty and helplessness, was too obviously a maniac to have been employed as an instrument by so cautious and shrewd a woman as Catherine always proved herself. To have had such a man tried, and to have exposed herself to the risk of his blabbing out the whole story from sheer stupidity or vaingloriousness, was a risk which it is incredible that Catherine should have run when there were so many other more effective and less public means of doing away with the frail and imbecile prisoner of Schlüsselburg. He could have died from some mortal disease without creating any stir.

CHAPTER XV

POLAND AND TURKEY

IMMEDIATELY after her accession, on the 2nd of August 1762, to be precise, Catherine wrote to Poniatovski to tell him that she was sending Count Keyserling as her Ambassador to Poland with instructions to cause Poniatovski to be elected King on the death of Augustus III, who was in a critical state of health. She added that, in the event of failure in this object, she desired to see elected Prince Adam Czartoryski, the leader of the Russian party. She wrote Keyserling in a similar sense. When Poniatovski was elected she recommended her personal representative at Warsaw, Prince Repnin, to espouse the cause of the Polish dissenters, namely, the Orthodox Greek Catholics, in distinction to the Roman Catholics, and to keep the question of the frontiers before him, for her glory was interested in both.

In 1697 Peter the Great had opposed the election of a French Prince, who was nevertheless chosen; in 1762 Catherine supported Poniatovski, and he was elected. It has been maintained that this increase in the influence of Russia was a consequence rather of the weakness of Poland than of the growth of the power of Russia.

As a Grand-Duchess, Catherine had already wisely expressed the opinion that the "fortunate" state of anarchy in Poland was more favourable to Russia than a strong government. Whatever opinions people may hold of Catherine's character and intellect, all are agreed that in statesmanship she was probably unrivalled, in the country of her adoption at least.

The first step towards the weakening of Poland was the recall of Biren from exile and his reinstatement as Duke of Courland, a title he had indeed never forfeited although during his absence in Siberia and later at Yaroslav the Roman

Catholic Prince Charles of Saxony had been nominated as ruler by his father, the King of Poland, who claimed rights of suzerainty over Courland. Peter III on his accession compelled Biren to abdicate, appointed Prince George Louis of Holstein as the Russian nominee, and dispatched General Goudovitch to Mittau to prepare the people to accept this Russian candidate, to emancipate themselves from Poland, and to seek the protection of the King of Prussia.

Immediately on her accession Catherine prohibited the ratification of the treaty with Prussia regarding Courland which had been already drafted, and instructed her Resident to support the claims of Biren in preference to those of the Holstein Prince George Louis, who was in the service of Prussia. Meanwhile, Prince Charles of Saxony, who had never been recognized by the people he had been placed over, but was nevertheless established in the ducal palace of Mittau, had to be displaced, and that was no easy matter. Whilst assuring Keyserling she had no intention of conquering Courland, seeing that she had already sufficient subjects whom it was her duty to make happy, she told him that having taken up this just, and consequently glorious, cause, she was determined to support it with all the firmness with which God had endowed her.

And indeed she acted firmly, vigorously, and logically. Prince Charles proposed to pay her his respects in St. Petersburg, in order to congratulate her on her accession, but was requested to spare himself the trouble, as it was not clear whether his presence would be agreeable. A pamphlet which he had published, entitled *Mémoire sur les affaires de Courlande*, she caused to be publicly burnt in Mittau and Riga.

Further, she ordered the Governor-General of Riga to send a battalion of troops to Mittau to be at the disposal of Simolin the Russian Resident, in view of the fact that disorders might at any moment take place in Courland. Thus provided with troops, Simolin began to make the life of Prince Charles so unbearable, especially by stopping supplies and sequestering the revenues, that he was able to report that Prince's departure, on the 13th of April 1763, for Warsaw. Simolin immediately had the vacated palace occupied by his troops on behalf of Biren, the Polish commandant being politely requested to withdraw his guard

and remove to another house. Biren was thus quietly reinstated without any fuss.

Catherine replied to Simolin's dispatch that it had her approval from beginning to end. By this simple if unceremonious procedure the Courland question was settled, Biren reinstated, and Prince Charles definitely expelled.

This may be described as Catherine's first success in the domain of foreign policy. In her subsequent attitude towards all the Baltic Provinces she was animated by no narrow spirit of nationalism; she promised to respect their religion, liberties, and institutions, and she kept her word. She admired the Baltic Provinces for the high state of culture they had achieved, and she wished to raise her Russian subjects to the same level, rather than drag her Baltic subjects down to that of the former.

By detaching Courland from Poland, Catherine had acted consistently, and, in the opinion of contemporary diplomatists, even in the interests of fairness and justice. The Polish question itself was less easy to tackle, seeing that nearly all the powers of Europe, including Turkey, were interested in the election of a King, after the death on the 25th September 1765 of Augustus III.

As we have seen, Catherine wrote at an early date to Keyserling to tell him that she had decided, in the event of the King's death, to support the candidature of Count Poniatovski, failing whom that of Prince Adam Czartoryski; to keep this decision secret, but to concentrate on the frontier a force of 30,000 men with a reserve of 50,000. She had apparently a very poor opinion of the Polish nobility, and instructed her representative to bribe them up to Rs.100,000.

Catherine, wishing to prevent the election of a Saxon Prince, and desirous of eliminating the candidates supported by Austria and France, addressed herself in the first instance to the King of Prussia, who had come so gloriously out of the Seven Years War. Frederick the Great replied that he was fully in accord with her ideas, and ready to join in any measures she might be desirous of suggesting, he only insisted that sound policy compelled him to oppose the candidature of any Austrian Prince. He very wisely added that should the death of the present King, he was writing on the 13th February 1763, occur unexpectedly, there was reason to fear that the intrigues of various Courts

might cause the scarcely extinguished fires of war again to burst forth into flame.

Catherine assured Frederick that she fully shared his views as to the inexpediency of the candidature of an Austrian Prince, but pointed out that the candidature of a French nominee was equally undesirable. And thus was commenced that mutual understanding between Russia and Prussia concerning Poland which was later to have such portentous results.

For the present there existed but a secret understanding regarding the policy to be jointly pursued in the event of the death of Augustus III. But the price of Frederick's support was a treaty of alliance between Prussia and Russia by which the prestige of Prussia was greatly strengthened, it was the precursor of those intimate relations between the two countries which have survived down to our own times and have not been seriously jeopardized even by the *entente* with France, which has nevertheless exposed them on more than one occasion to a strain perilously near what in mathematics is called the "breaking point."

The treaty was concluded on the 31st March 1764; the two countries mutually guaranteed each other's dominions, and the alliance was what would to-day be called offensive and defensive in character. Frederick II took advantage of the Polish question to secure the friendship of Russia, and Catherine of the alliance to bring about an identity of interests in Poland of Prussia and Russia, for the treaty bound the two high contracting parties to defend the liberties of that country against third parties, and to invade Poland with their armies in order to restore the old conditions in the event of internal revolution.

The attitude of France was less hostile than had been expected. At a council summoned by Louis XV a ministerial memorandum was read, which contained some passages which, when studied in the light of subsequent events, cannot fail to raise a smile.

The memorandum insisted that France had no interests in Poland. The distance of Poland from France alone sufficed to prove this. It was absurd to talk about a partition of Poland. The self-interest of those powers which could carry out such a partition was Poland's most effective protection against this

danger. Poland, situated between Austria, Prussia, Russia, and Turkey, was surrounded by four powers who regarded each other with eyes of rivalry, and were thus compulsorily constituted to be the defenders rather than the destroyers of Poland, for each of them dreaded the aggrandizement of any of the others at the expense of that country. Hence France could safely leave the task of the maintenance of the integrity of Poland to these four powers. The partition of that kingdom could only result from some extraordinary circumstance, such as a war, in which France need not, however, participate. Finally, assuming even that the partition of Poland should be effected by these four powers, in spite of all probability, or that one of them should by some means or other acquire Polish territory, it was doubtful whether this would affect French interests. Any understanding which might be entered into between Prussia and Russia would not be conducive to a lasting alliance, but was bound to be ephemeral, for any increase of territory resulting from it could only lead to jealousy and enmity. The King was advised to refrain from putting forward any candidate whatever for the Polish throne, as such a course would involve the country in useless expense, and might conceivably lead to the outbreak of a general conflagration.

Whilst France refrained from putting forward her own candidate or taking any direct interest in the Polish election, she supported the Austrian candidate through the intermediary of Turkey.

In Constantinople it was put about that the reason why Catherine supported the candidature of Count Poniatovski was that she was desirous of marrying her former lover. Those who believed this story did not know the extent of the influence of the Orloffs, who would never have suffered any such interference with their position. Nevertheless, the story spread from Constantinople to Warsaw and alarmed the great Czartoryski family. They saw how the possibility of a marriage with an Orthodox Greek Catholic Empress would spoil the chances of a King of Roman Catholic Poland. Poniatovski must at once marry or become betrothed to a Polish Roman Catholic lady. But this, Poniatovski flatly refused to do. He would not bind himself; moreover, as the title was not hereditary, he did not see that it

signified whom he married, or whether he married at all. The Czartoryskis, who wished to make their kinsman's kingship an hereditary institution, were beside themselves. Fortunately Catherine came to the rescue; she advised Poniatovski to follow the counsels of his family. This was only one of the many blows which the strangely fated man had to endure. The question of choice was, however, not so easy to settle; at last it was decided that he should pledge himself to espouse nobody without the consent of the Polish Senate, nor any one but a Roman Catholic, giving the preference to a lady of Polish nationality.

The Russian troops now entered Poland "in order to protect her liberties," and in spite of the protests of Count Branitsky and Prince Radzivill, who were both defeated, and fled the country. Count Poniatovski was subsequently unanimously elected without any disturbances or incident, and Catherine on hearing the news wrote to Panin: "I congratulate you on the King whom we have made."

Whether the election of this King was really a subject deserving of congratulation for the Poles is doubtful, equally doubtful is it whether any other King would have saved them from a fate which seemed almost inevitable. Vodovozoff, a popular Russian historical writer, says of him that his extreme amiability of disposition led him to forgive insults easily, made him hate strife, and caused him to endeavour to conciliate his enemies, in his desire to please everybody. Such a man, in this historian's opinion, might have been a desirable monarch had not Poland been at the time in a disorganized condition. But Stanislaus had neither the firmness nor the soundness of character necessary for overcoming opposition. He was addicted to pleasure and was susceptible to the fascinations of the fair sex, on whom he wasted large sums of money. In his kindness towards others he mainly sought peace and quietness. It cannot be said that he was devoid of patriotism, but he was afraid of force of any kind, and retreated before it; anybody who had got the power into his hands could carry him with him, and he was accused of duplicity when he was only wanting in determination. Under such a King, governing a disorganized and unruly country, and surrounded by greedy and powerful neigh-

bours, the partition of Poland could only be a question of time.

Prince Henry of Prussia, the brother of Frederick the Great, has claimed credit for the idea of putting an end to the constant disturbances and the perpetual menace to the peace of Europe, caused by the nobles and electors of Poland, by partitioning that country. But, as we have seen, the idea was in the air, it was familiar to the minds of French statesmen, and may be assumed to have been a factor in the diplomatic equations of the time. By the recognition in 1603 of the Elector of Brandenburg as Duke of Prussia, Poland paved the way for, or—shall we say?—initiated, her own disintegration.

An elective kingdom in Europe could perhaps be tolerated so long as her eastern neighbour, Russia, had not joined the comity of nations, but from the moment that Peter the Great opened his window into Europe and Russia turned her back on Asia, Poland became a standing menace to the peace of Europe. Had her population been less unruly, had they possessed even to a small degree a few of the more essential civic virtues, she might have exhibited a solid front to her neighbours, but as it was she was torn by faction; self-interest and party spirit had virtually destroyed her patriotism, and she exhibited a melancholy illustration of a kingdom divided against itself which cannot stand.

The events in Poland had their influence on the relations between Russia and Turkey. Desirous of helping Poland, Turkey declared war against Russia, and this war, as Professor Brückner sententiously points out, showed the extent of the decline of the power of the Ottoman Empire, by resulting in a complete victory for Russia.

Soon after the accession of Catherine it became known in St. Petersburg that the Porte intended to back the Poles. In this attitude Turkey was mainly sustained by French diplomacy. A wise contemporary Polish writer justly remarked that to drive out the Russians by the aid of the Turks was like burning a house down in order to rid it of mice. Moreover, the Russians were not driven out, but the partition of Poland became inevitable. The occupation by Cossacks of the small town of Balta on the Turkish frontier and the incidental killing of a

number of Turks, Moldavians, and Tartars precipitated matters. The Russian Ambassádor at Constantinople was summoned before the Grand Vizier, severely lectured, and finally arrested. War was now inevitable.

With characteristic energy Catherine herself directed the preparations for a campaign against Russia's hereditary enemy. Her first efforts were devoted to setting the navy in order, and she was able in writing to Tchernisheff to say: "I have so tickled up our sailors in regard to their trade that they are burning with zeal"; and later she could write that she had now a fleet under her patronage which she would be able to employ as it had never been employed before.

For all that, Russia was quite unprepared; her troops were deficient, many regiments were under-manned, the men were badly fed, badly clothed, and irregularly paid, the administration was faulty, the military stores were mostly unserviceable. Fortunately for Russia, the state of the Turkish forces was even more deplorable. It was a conflict between cripples. The situation was further complicated by an incursion of Tartars into Russian territory in 1769.

Catherine exhibited an extraordinary versatility; she multiplied herself, as the French put it, she tackled questions of strategy and military policy, she addressed herself to the finances of her country, and she took a meticulous interest in every detail connected with the equipment of a fleet for the Black Sea, concerning which she wrote that she was glad to see the foreign papers had stated her fleet had been dispatched to take Constantinople; this, she added, with characteristic ponderous humour, was nevertheless easier than to seize the moon with one's teeth.

She spared no pains to fire with ambition the somewhat unimaginative breast of her general, the worthy Roumyantzeff, and, anticipating the famous phrase of Napoleon, told him that the eyes of Europe were upon him. On learning that he had taken the Hospodars of Wallachia and Moldavia prisoners, she again made one of those clumsy jokes to which she was so greatly addicted, by begging him to capture the Grand Vizier as well, and if possible, the Sultan.

Further, she pointed out the necessity of taking Bender, which was done, but not before 1770; and, after the occupation by

Russian troops of Azoff and Taganrog, she began to plan the formation of an Azoff fleet wherewith to threaten Turkish possessions in the Black Sea, command the Danube delta, and menace Constantinople. She even conceived the idea of effecting the conquest of the Caucasus, and collected information concerning Tiflis, etc.

The congratulations of Frederick the Great on her victories gave her particular satisfaction. In one of her letters to Ivan Tchernisheff she says : " I require much cannon, for I am setting fire to the Turkish Empire from four corners ; whether it will burst into flame and be burnt down I cannot tell, but this I know, that since its inception there have never been taken so much pains and trouble against it."

She certainly spared no pains. Whether her noble dream to revive the Byzantine Empire had already taken shape in her brain at this early date it is difficult to say, but her actions certainly would bear that interpretation. Her policy in Turkey was similar to her policy in Poland, when she supported the Orthodox Greek population against the oppressions of the Roman Catholics. In Turkey she employed emissaries to stir up the Christian races in Greece, Dalmatia, Montenegro, and the Balkans, against the conquering and ruling Mussulmans. Brückner even believes that Catherine may have cherished the idea of completely destroying the power of Turkey by annexation.

For this purpose a fleet was, however, necessary, and in 1765 Catherine wrote to Panin to say : " We have a superfluity of vessels and men, but we have neither fleet nor sailors " ; and after describing how badly the ships were handled, she concluded : " It must be confessed that the vessels resembled the fleet which leaves Holland every year for the herring fishery, but were totally unlike men of war, for there was not a single ship that could keep in line."

Under Alexis Orloff, who was in Italy for his health at the time, she dispatched in 1769 the famous expedition to the Greek Archipelago. Innumerable decrees and letters from Catherine to Orloff and other admirals and statesmen testify to the lively interest she took in this expedition.

A very important factor was the attitude of Great Britain, who on this occasion at least was not disposed to place obstacles in the way or to hamper Russia in her successes over Turkey, although

she deprecated the creation of independent Christian states which would regard Russia as their patron. The French, however, looked on the expedition with strong disfavour, but did nothing to stop it, although Choiseul submitted a scheme to the Cabinet of Louis XV for the destruction of the Russian fleet before it could reach Gibraltar.

However, the scheme to bring about a simultaneous rising of all the Christian populations in Turkey proved abortive, and Catherine was disgusted with the Greeks for their supineness. The insurrection was limited to a little brigandage and some local massacres, and was put down by the Turks with their usual vengeful cruelty.

Voltaire compared Russia's attack on Turkey to Hannibal's campaign against Rome, but Catherine replied that the Carthaginians had to fight a colossus in full vigour, whilst Russia was opposed to a weak phantom which fell to pieces when it was touched.

Although Alexis Orloff was unsuccessful in this invasion of the Morea, he gave battle to the Turkish fleet off the island of Chios, defeated, pursued, and totally destroyed it, burning it to the water.

The destruction of the fleet was speedily followed by the complete defeat on the Danube by Roumyantzeff of the Turkish army, which considerably exceeded his own in numbers. Not content with these two lines of operation, Catherine determined to conquer the Crimea, and free it for ever from Turkish control.

Frederick the Great was very anxious to put a stop to the war. He told Prince Kaunitz that this confounded Turkish War made him uneasy and interfered with his plans. He said that he would be driven to despair if he found himself compelled to declare war against Austria, "and as you," he continued, "cannot calmly look on while the Russian troops cross the Danube, but would certainly be obliged to oppose the inordinate successes of Russia, such a misfortune might easily overtake me."

To Solms he wrote that it seemed to him that the Empress desired with all her heart to drag the whole of Europe into this conflict. He consequently earnestly counselled peace, advice which did not fall pleasantly on Catherine's ears.

Hearing that the King's brother, Prince Henry, was in Sweden

at that time, the Empress requested Frederick to permit his brother to visit St. Petersburg. Prince Henry arrived towards the end of 1770 and remained some time. He made as excellent an impression on the Empress as she did on him.

It was during the frequent interviews between these two exalted personages that the partition of Poland was first discussed and that the idea first began to take shape. Austria had just seized a province, Russia was actually in possession of the lion's share; the partition had virtually begun. Frederick the Great had instructed Solms to procure for him at least a small piece, which would be some little compensation for the subsidies he had to pay to Russia. It is rather significant of the times that the wishes of the population were not consulted nor even taken into consideration.

There is no exaggeration in saying that the partition of Poland was brought about as the result of the weakness of the country and the internecine strife of its partisan nobility. It was inevitable, for without such a partition Austria, Prussia, and Russia would most assuredly have come to blows. Frederick the Great's point of view was simple, practical, and business-like. He said: "It makes no difference to Russia from whence she obtains compensation for the expenses of the Turkish War; and as the war was a consequence of the troubles in Poland, let Russia seek compensation in Poland." He counselled Austria to look up her archives and see whether she could not make out a claim for portions of Polish territory, adding: "Believe me, we must make the best of this opportunity; I shall take my part, Russia hers," etc.

Austria was still, however, wavering, and had half a mind to make common cause with Turkey against Russia. Catherine's attitude was lofty and firm; she declared that she would never submit to be dictated to by Austria. On the other hand, Maria-Theresa had scruples about joining in the game of grab in Poland, but these were finally overcome. Poland lost 4000 square miles of territory with a population of over five millions, and retained 6000 square miles and a population of nine millions. Russia obtained the region known as White Russia, on the Dvina and Dniepr, a territory of about 1775 square miles and a population of 1,800,000 inhabitants.

The acquisition of this territory had considerable significance for Catherine. A century earlier, under similar circumstances, and thanks to the close connection of religious and political interests, Little Russia was united to the state of Muscovy. Her defence of her co-religionists in Poland gave Catherine's action the import of a national achievement. The final partition of Poland took place in 1791.

The Turkish War was meanwhile running its course, although preliminary peace negotiations were in progress but repeatedly broken off, both parties, in spite of being heartily tired of fighting, refusing to give way one to the other. Bad as the plight of Turkey was, that of Russia was perhaps nearly as bad. The plague had made its appearance amongst the troops, the revolution in Sweden was most disquieting, and by way of climax the Pougatcheff rebellion had broken out ; moreover, Roumyantzeff's lucky star had forsaken him, and his want of success of late had encouraged the Turks to be less conciliatory.

Fortunately for Catherine, with the death of the Sultan Mustapha a change came over the scene of operations, Roumyantzeff's good luck returned, and it was possible, after a few victories, to conclude a peace in 1774 on satisfactory, not to say glorious, terms.

Russia obtained Kertch, Yenikale, and the whole region between the Boug and the Dniepr, with the right of navigating the Black Sea, the Crimea was made independent of Turkey, and Azoff, both Kabards, the Kuban plain, and the Terek were ceded to Russia, who also received an indemnity of Rs.4,500,000. More important perhaps still, Russia was acknowledged to be the protector of the Christian populations of Moldavia and Wallachia, and Turkey undertook to levy moderate taxes, and to exercise toleration towards her Christian subjects. In this way Russia acquired the right of interference in the internal affairs of Turkey.

CHAPTER XVI

BARON DIMSDALE

THE Empress Catherine was, without exaggeration, the bravest monarch of her time. Her courage was as masculine as her intellect, and she seems to have been entirely devoid of fear. But great as her physical courage undoubtedly was, her moral courage was perhaps even greater. On no occasion was that moral courage exhibited to better advantage than when she invited the English surgeon, Thomas Dimsdale, over to St. Petersburg to inoculate her and her son, the Grand-Duke Paul, against small-pox. The Russian people, steeped in ignorance and superstition, regarded this procedure with anything but a friendly eye, but the courage of the Empress was equal to the occasion.

In the Imperial Archives there is preserved a manuscript memorandum by Baron Dimsdale on his visit to Russia. This memorandum is in French, but in the *Transactions* of the Imperial Russian Historical Society we are told that the French is so bad that the meaning of the author could be ascertained with difficulty. However, M. Zlobin has prepared for that Society a very readable Russian translation on which the present narrative is based.

Thomas Dimsdale was born in Essex in 1712, and came of a Quaker family, his grandfather having been one of the founders, with William Penn, of Pennsylvania. Thomas Dimsdale commenced his career as an army surgeon, and served under the Duke of Cumberland in Germany. Later he took up a practice in Hertford. He was one of the promoters of inoculation against small-pox in England, and soon became famous for his successes. He was invited to Russia in 1768 to inoculate the Empress and her son, and in 1781 he again visited that country to inoculate

the Grand-Dukes Alexander and Constantine. He was twice returned for Parliament, and died at Hertford at an advanced age on the 30th December 1800.

After giving a brief history of the spread of small-pox in Russia, Dimsdale, in his memorandum, recounts the immediate cause of his being summoned. A beautiful and wealthy young lady of noble family, engaged to be married to a distinguished nobleman holding an important office at the Court, contracted the disease a few days before her intended wedding and died from it. This melancholy circumstance brought home to the entire Court the danger to which the Empress and her son were exposed, and decided the Sovereign to obtain the services of a medical man from England, where inoculation against small-pox had been brought to a high state of perfection.

Dimsdale then goes on to describe how he was summoned by a messenger from the Russian Ambassador in London to come up and see him on this matter. But the idea of going to Russia did not please Dimsdale. He had made a reputation, had a good practice, and was possessed of an income ample for all his needs; moreover, he was very happy in his social relations and particularly in his family life, and had many children to whom he was devoted and whom he was loath to leave. He therefore declined the proffered honour and undertook to find a suitable substitute. We will spare our readers the lengthy recital of how he was finally prevailed upon to accept the honour thus thrust upon him. But he was too shrewd a Quaker to name a fee. With a disinterestedness which did as much credit to his heart as to his head, he declared that he left the question of his remuneration entirely to the Empress. Thereupon the Ambassador at once handed him a thousand pounds for travelling expenses. In order to enliven the journey and to make his stay in St. Petersburg more pleasant, he was allowed to take a travelling companion, his choice falling on one of his sons who had just finished his medical studies in Edinburgh and had acted as his assistant.

The estimable Quaker could not of course enter upon his long voyage, more especially the land journey from Amsterdam to his destination, for which a special conveyance had to be purchased, without moralizing. Robbers, he said, were but



BARON DIMSDALE

FROM A RUSSIAN ENGRAVING IN THE POSSESSION OF THE PRESENT BARON

rarely encountered, but in order to inspire them with fear it was well to carry arms. Whilst recommending the taking of provisions, he nevertheless added that the most important article to be provided with was a good supply of patience, with the requisite amount of cheerfulness. "My countrymen," he says, "are too easily disposed to fret if they fail to meet, outside of England, with the comforts and attention to which they are accustomed at home. They should moderate their expectations in this respect, and endeavour to obtain by means of a lavish liberality, which they will not find irksome, whatever the locality may offer, and thus also to assure themselves of every attention to their wants."

Armed with such laudable maxims, Mr. Dimsdale and his son performed their journey so rapidly that they arrived at St. Petersburg before the house which was being prepared for them was ready to receive them. However, a magnificent apartment was placed at their disposal in the Millyonnaya (the Millionaire Street) in close proximity to the palace, together with an elegantly appointed carriage and all the comforts they could possibly wish for. The Empress was still at Peterhof, about thirteen miles from the capital, and the Grand-Duke at his summer residence. Count Panin was, however, in town, and desired to see the surgeon. The gracious reception accorded to him by this statesman left an indelible impression on the mind of the simple and unsophisticated Quaker, who gives a full report of the rather pompous speech in which Panin informed him how the peace and welfare of his country were dependent upon the precious lives of the Empress and her son, which were about to be entrusted to his medical skill.

On the following day Mr. Dimsdale and his son were presented to the Grand-Duke Paul and remained to dinner, the Grand-Duke being in the best of spirits.

On the morning of the following day Dimsdale was presented to the Empress, with whom were only Count Panin and Baron Tcherkassoff; the latter was the President of the College of Medicine, had studied at Cambridge, and spoke English perfectly.

The questions which the Empress asked him caused Dimsdale to form a most favourable opinion of her intellectual

alertness. The conversation was conducted in French, a language with which the honest Englishman admits he was but imperfectly acquainted, but fortunately Baron Tcherkassoff came to his rescue when he found himself in a difficulty. The Empress was graciously pleased to express her belief that after a little practice Mr. Dimsdale would no doubt be able to speak French fairly well.

The surgeon remained to dinner, and "as court etiquette is not everywhere the same," he thought it might be of interest to relate "how people dine at the Court of St. Petersburg."

"We were seated at a long table. The Empress sat at the head by herself, about twelve nobles being at the same table with her. The dinner consisted of various excellent viands prepared in the French manner, and succeeded by dessert of the finest fruits and preserves such as I had not expected to find in that country. But the empire of Her Majesty extends to every climate and her table is plentifully supplied with the produce of the most favoured regions, and I was told that there were on the table melons from Astrachan, on the borders of Persia, from whence even grapes are imported in large quantities; many apples and pears from the Ukraine, and Moscow melons. On this occasion fresh English pine-apples were served, as well as a pine-apple which had been grown in Russia, and which, although small, was nevertheless very good eating. The pleasantness of this dinner was enhanced by the affability and unaffected condescension of the Empress. To every one of her guests she was attentive and amiable; although we did not understand the language spoken, the conversation was evidently conducted in as unconstrained and cheerful a manner as might have been expected in a company composed of equals, and not of subjects privileged to have the honour of being in the society of their Sovereign."

On the following day Dimsdale again saw the Empress, and was informed that she had decided to be inoculated with as little delay as possible. The conscientious and punctilious English medical practitioner requested to be allowed to have the co-operation of the Court doctors in so serious a matter, in order that he might be able to explain to them every detail of the treatment and inform them what medicines were used. But

the Empress would not hear of such a consultation and made him the following little speech :

“ You have come here possessed of the reputation of an expert and honest medical man ; the conversation which I had with you on this subject was entirely satisfactory and has increased my confidence in you. I have not the slightest doubt in my mind concerning your abilities and your comprehensive knowledge in this branch of medical science. My body-physicians, being without experience, cannot be adepts in inoculation against small-pox, and their assistance would therefore be more likely to hamper than to aid you, without any benefit whatever to you. My life belongs to me and I have great pleasure in entrusting it entirely to you. You can learn nothing from them concerning myself specifically, for I have always, thank God, enjoyed such excellent health that I have never had occasion to consult them, and I will myself tell you all you may require to know about me. I may further inform you that I have decided to submit myself to inoculation before the Grand-Duke is done, provided always that this meets with your approval ; at the same time I do not want this matter to be talked about. For this reason I charge you to arrange matters in such a manner as to convince everybody that my intention is not to be inoculated for the present. The preparations for this important experiment on the person of the Grand-Duke will facilitate your visits to the Court, where I desire to see you often in order that you may become fully acquainted with my constitution and have every opportunity of deciding the time and circumstances of my own inoculation.”

The caution and conscientiousness of Dimsdale were not to be so easily brushed aside. Whilst promising to obey Her Majesty's wishes, he nevertheless proposed to carry out some preliminary inoculations on several persons of her sex, age, and constitution. The Empress would not, however, hear of such an *experimentum in corpore vili*, and pointed out that had the operation been entirely new and unknown, or had there existed any doubt as to his ability and experience, then this precaution might possibly be necessary, but as she had no doubts on the subject whatever there was no reason for delay.

Having turned the house of the famous Baron Wolff into

a sort of hospital and secured the co-operation of two doctors from the Baltic Provinces, the inexorable Dimsdale, before inoculating the Empress, submitted two military cadets to the operation. This preliminary test was performed by Dimsdale's son, seeing that Dimsdale himself would have been unable to continue his observations on the Empress and the Grand-Duke had he been in actual contact with small-pox cases.

The virus was taken from the child of poor parents living in the outskirts of St. Petersburg. The child was fine and healthy and no complications were expected, nevertheless it died, but not, in Dimsdale's opinion, from small-pox, but from the effects of the stifling atmosphere in which his parents insisted on keeping him. Had the Dimsdales been better acquainted with the rigours of the Russian climate they would have perhaps understood the rooted objection to open windows.

The experiment on the cadets was also unsatisfactory. One of these, Bassoff, fell ill of a fever the day after the inoculation. It was ascertained that he had overloaded his stomach with dried fruit the day before. His symptoms caused Dimsdale much anxiety. The inoculation was not successful. The fever was accompanied by nausea, which was partly due to fear, for although the cadets had shown splendid courage they appear to have regarded themselves as martyrs to science and to have had a lively dread of the consequences of the inoculation.

Dimsdale now received a summons from the Empress, who thus addressed him :

" Your sorrowful looks don't please me. Tell me what is the matter ? "

Dimsdale reported to her fully on the condition of the cadets.

" This is equally disagreeable to me," she said ; " but tell me truthfully the cause of the cadet's indisposition. Has it been caused by small-pox, or by something else ? "

Dimsdale assured her that he was confident small-pox was not the cause, because the illness had shown itself before the inoculation could possibly have taken, and was attended by totally different symptoms.

" Then leave off worrying about it," said the Empress. " I feel quite sure that, with God's help, the cadet will recover and it will all end satisfactorily. I must confess that this is

indeed a misfortune, because if anything should happen, though from another cause, nothing will convince the people that it was not due to small-pox. This will but increase prejudices from the very start, and will make it more difficult for me to carry out my determination to introduce inoculation in my realm. However, keep a cheerful spirit; we cannot do more than act justly and straightforwardly. I am very pleased with all you have done, and you may count on my protection and support; and whatever may happen to this young man shall not alter my decision, provided you think it well to inoculate me. I am prepared to submit to the operation at your hands, and thus establish the reputation of inoculation."

Dimsdale had expressed a desire to go to the Wolff hospital and see the cadet himself, and this the Empress approved, but, as she hoped that better news might be received of the cadet in the course of the day, she advised Dimsdale to wait till the evening, by which time he would be in a position to judge whether he need go.

Fortunately the cadet took a turn for the better from that very day, and the improvement of both patients was maintained. In the case of Bassoff the inoculation was quite successful, but the other cadet, to the annoyance of all concerned, developed small-pox.

Dimsdale studied his two future patients carefully, saw the Empress once or twice every day, and took his meals with the Grand-Duke. That the Grand-Duke was to be inoculated was common gossip, but the Empress's decision was less widely known, indeed it was even believed that she had changed her mind on the subject.

The two cadets having completely recovered, Dimsdale decided to inoculate four more in the presence of local German practitioners in order to show them how it was done.

Another suitable child was found which had contracted small-pox, but in this case a tragedy occurred. The mother of the child fell at Dimsdale's feet with her face to the ground and implored him in Russian to spare her child. As Dimsdale could not understand her he asked the local practitioner to explain, and was told that the Russians had a superstition that a sick person from whom matter was taken for the cure of others would surely die, and that consequently the mother

had refused to allow the virus to be taken from her child. The father, however, inquired whether it was the desire of the Empress that this should be done, and on being told it was, ordered his wife to give way, adding that at the wish of the Empress he was willing to sacrifice his child. The mother, however, kept trembling while the inoculation of the cadets proceeded, and Dimsdale had great difficulty afterwards in getting the window opened, so as to save the child's life.

This second experiment was even less satisfactory than the first. In no case did the inoculation take, and Dimsdale was proceeding to make preparations for experiments to prove his theory that all these cadets must have had the actual disease itself in their childhood or early youth without knowing it, which he says was often the case, when the Empress lost patience and commanded him to inoculate her without any further ado.

At nine o'clock one evening a messenger from Baron Tcherkassoff arrived at the house of Wolff, ordering Dimsdale to be at the palace at ten and bring the necessary virus with him. The doctor had received his instructions several days earlier and was prepared. Accompanied by his son, who carried a child which had been successfully inoculated, he was driven to the palace and conducted by Baron Tcherkassoff up a secret stairway into the presence of the Empress. She was quickly inoculated, and young Dimsdale returned with the child to the Wolff building, where he told the inmates that he had been summoned to inoculate a nobleman of high rank. With an uneasy conscience, no doubt, after this terminological inexactitude, the two pious Quakers, father and son, passed the night at their private residence, and on the following day Dimsdale was taken to Tzarskoye Selo, where the Empress had gone with a very few attendants, ostensibly for the purpose of looking after some repairs. Presently, however, a number of courtiers followed, and the Empress became alarmed lest they might get small-pox from her. She asked Dimsdale's advice, and told him that although she had desired to keep her inoculation a secret for the time being, she would not conceal her condition for a moment if he thought there was any danger of

infection. She therefore proclaimed publicly that she had been inoculated.

During the whole of the period she was most cheerful and took part in all amusements with her usual high spirits, without betraying the least anxiety concerning what she had undergone. She dined with others as before, enlivening the whole Court with her brilliant conversation, for which she was as much distinguished, says Dimsdale, as for her gracious manners and lofty dignity.

Writing to the Governor of Livonia, General Browne, on the 16th November 1768, the Empress says : " Yesterday I received your letter, in which you congratulate me on having been successfully inoculated. As you tell me, General, that I must have had great courage to undergo this operation, I suppose I must believe that this is the case, although I had hitherto thought that every street-boy in England possessed sufficient courage for this purpose. The honest and capable Dr. Dimsdale, your countryman, makes everybody here brave, and there is no house of any consequence in St. Petersburg where he has not several patients whom he has specially treated in this manner. The Grand-Duke is, thank God, making good progress, so that this fear has also been overcome."

In the case of the Grand-Duke, however, Dimsdale encountered unexpected difficulties. The Grand-Duke's two medical attendants refused their co-operation. The one on the plea that he did not understand anything about inoculation, the other on more mysterious grounds exposed in a memorandum which has since disappeared from the archives, and concerning which Dimsdale says :

" Nobody, I think, will read this report without being surprised to learn that the Grand-Duke was so injudiciously brought up during his childhood. Dr. Foussadier assured me that this was due to the immoderate affection of the late Empress Elizabeth, who took the heir to the empire under her own wing from his birth. Although she was, generally speaking, a most solicitous Sovereign, she was, unfortunately, prejudiced in favour of certain old ladies, to whom she absolutely entrusted the education of the Grand-Duke."

Dr. Vigor, an English Court physician, also refused his aid,

saying that the matter was so serious he would rather not be mixed up in it. However, Dimsdale examined the young Grand-Duke and speedily convinced himself that there was nothing the matter with him.

Both the Empress and the Grand-Duke allowed others to be inoculated with their own virus, and, as Dimsdale justly remarks, it was thanks to this condescension, which, he considered, did him great honour, that the foolish superstition, to the effect that the person from whom matter was taken must die, was entirely broken down.

"Immediately after the recovery of the Grand-Duke," he goes on to say, "I was informed by a nobleman of high rank of the distinguished honour and generous remuneration which the Empress was graciously pleased to bestow upon me for my care and trouble, namely, that I was to be created a Baron of the Russian Empire, nominated a Privy Councillor, and appointed body-physician to the Empress, with an annual pension for life of five hundred pounds sterling, which would be paid me in England, and finally that I was to receive the portraits in miniature of the Empress and the Grand-Duke, with the proviso that they should be retained as heirlooms in my family in commemoration of the services I had rendered the Empire. Her Majesty was also graciously pleased to express her exalted approval of the services of my son, and to create him a Baron as well, in addition to which she ordered him to be presented with a magnificent gold snuff-box studded with diamonds."

The exalted example of the Empress and Grand-Duke had a very wide effect: most of the aristocracy in St. Petersburg were inoculated by Dimsdale at their private residences. Nor was this all. The Empress informed him one day that a number of noble families resident in Moscow were desirous of coming to the capital for this purpose, and expressed her apprehensions for the safety of the young children whom it was thus proposed to bring all that journey during the severe Russian winter. Dimsdale, who was getting anxious to return home, nevertheless offered to visit Moscow, and this offer was graciously accepted. He gives a most interesting and enthusiastic account of that city.

When everybody worth speaking of had been inoculated in Moscow, and an inoculation station inaugurated, Dimsdale

contracted pleurisy and was confined to his room for some time. As soon as he could venture to travel he returned to St. Petersburg, travelling in a very comfortable sledge which admitted of his being stretched out on a mattress in a recumbent position. Arrived in St. Petersburg his arrangements for returning to England were so far completed that he was on the point of departure when he was summoned to the palace to find the Empress stricken down with a fever.

The energetic, not to say heroic, remedies adopted in those days soon caused the most alarming symptoms to disappear, and in a short time the Empress's health, which, Dimsdale confesses, had caused him grave anxiety, was restored.

Nothing now stood in the way of the return journey, for which the Empress presented the surgeon with a priceless muff of Siberian blue fox.

Dimsdale has left on record his opinion of Catherine the Great, and has described her, as he saw her, in the following sentences :

"Catherine II, Empress of All the Russias, is above the middle height, she has so much grace and dignity, that assuming it to be possible to forget her exalted rank, she would be acclaimed even here as one of the most amiable persons of her sex. She adds to her natural charms, courtesy of manner and kindness and benignity of the highest degree, besides manifesting on every occasion such clearness of judgment as to compel admiration. Her Majesty speaks Russian, German, and French perfectly, reads Italian without difficulty, and although she does not know enough English to be able to converse in that language, yet she can understand sufficiently well whatever is said ; and this was of great service to me when I was unable to express my meaning in French. The Empress observes in an exemplary manner the rites of the Greek Church ; at table she is most moderate, and never drinks more than one or two tumblers of water, with the addition of a little wine. She rises very early in the morning and devotes herself with indefatigable zeal to affairs of State. The promotion and encouragement of the liberal arts, the welfare of her subjects, these are the objects to which, in times of peace, she devotes all her splendid talents. Her exceptional ability did much towards bringing the war to an end, into which, in spite of the benevolent

inclinations of the Empress, Russia was irresistibly forced, and I sincerely hope it may be followed by a durable and advantageous peace, thanks to which the Empress may again shine as the patroness of arts and commerce and advance the prosperity of her extensive dominions."

The worthy Dimsdale was hardly an impartial critic, and had, as we have seen, very good reason for admiring his benefactress. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that he was an absolutely independent person, a man of assured reputation and comfortable income, who had no desire to go to Russia, but was recommended to the ambassador as the most expert practitioner in the prevention of small-pox, and who only consented to undertake the responsibilities thrust upon him after repeated importunity. Such a man, austere in training and character, would hardly have expressed himself as he did had he not genuinely believed what he said.

His description of the Russian aristocracy, as he saw it, is very interesting, and indirectly implies a great tribute to the moderating, refining, and civilizing influence of the Empress. He says :

"Everybody is prejudicial against other countries, and against their manners and customs. Hence many English people, who are surprised at the character of the exalted persons described above [Dimsdale has also left us a thumbnail sketch of the Grand-Duke Paul], have a different opinion of the aristocracy and the people of Russia, and even believe that they preserve vestiges of barbarism in their midst. I shall not say anything of what they were before, but beg to observe that I am speaking of the years 1768 and 1769 only ; at that period, the performance of my medical duties and the frequent invitations to the tables of the nobility gave me an opportunity of becoming acquainted with them and their families, and enabled me to form a more accurate idea of them than can possibly be obtained in the superficial and conventional acquaintanceships made at ordinary social gatherings. I can certify absolutely that persons of rank are polite, high-minded, and honourable, and, what may seem stranger still, extremely moderate in the use of strong drink. It may be easily imagined that I had no frequent intercourse with the lower orders, nevertheless, to the best of my observation,

they always seemed ready to render any services in their power, and during any walks abroad, when I was alone, I had occasion to put their obliging kindness to the test ; frequently did I have to ask my way and make myself understood by signs only, and I always found the poorer classes to be most intelligent and ready to be of service."

CHAPTER XVII

POUGATCHEFF

AS we have seen, the Empress was actively concerned in bringing culture and enlightenment within the reach of her subjects. The welfare of her people, the elevation of their minds, the refinement of their manners, the improvement of their condition were ever present in her thoughts. She felt, however, and perhaps, when judged in the light of the last fifty years of Russian history, her sentiment was not so very far wrong, that the lower classes must be reached indirectly, and that the first duty of a Sovereign was to raise the status of the nobility, for without educated and able leaders it was hopeless to govern and improve the masses. While she severely punished abuses, and set her face against the cruelties practised too often by the landowners on their serfs, she consolidated the position of the nobility, and was generally more aristocratic than democratic in her leanings. Perhaps she understood that much time must elapse before the peasantry, sunk in ignorance and misery, the slaves of brutal masters, could be ripe for emancipation and citizenship. She was certainly, besides being a deeply read and liberal-minded philosopher, a remarkably shrewd and practical woman, with more than ordinary common sense. Notwithstanding repeated rumours to the effect that the peasants were about to be emancipated from serfdom, she never took any practical steps in that direction, nor is this surprising when the contemporary condition of the majority of continental nations, who were regarded as far in advance of Russia, is borne in mind.

From the very first Catherine had difficulties with the people. We have seen how the mining and factory population had gone on strike in the early years of her reign, and how their pacifica-

tion was effected, the methods adopted being of a nature peculiar to those times and not particularly conciliatory.

Russian historians, imbued with democratic ideas, have given us lurid pictures of the condition of the rural population in those barbaric times. They ignore the fact that in France, Austria, and Prussia the lot of the peasant was hardly more enviable, and that even in the United Kingdom it left much to be desired. Though two blacks do not make a white, it seems somewhat unreasonable to expect conditions to have been appreciably better in a country like Russia, which had been but recently europeanized by the iron hand of Peter the Great, than they were in Western Europe, upon which the blessings of civilization had been steadily descending for a considerable period.

In any case the serfs of Russia were as discontented as the people of all other countries; constant riots relieved the monotony of their oppressed existence, but these were usually quelled with a severity which, from the point of view of the landed classes, left nothing to be desired. There were large districts of unsettled prairie land inhabited by outlaws and robbers, and these occasionally raided the estates of the gentry, and generally added to the prevailing disquietude. The Volga especially and the regions beyond were haunted by bandits, river pirates, and questionable Cossacks, to say nothing of deserters from the army, refugees from the land, and dissenters. The times were peculiarly suitable for the appearance of Pougatcheff.

Russian historians speak glibly of Pougatcheff without stopping to think of the meaning of his name. The word "ispoug" means fright, and "pougat" means to frighten, hence Pougatcheff was so appropriately named that one is led to wonder whether his was not a *nom de guerre* invented for him by the designing and cunning persons whose instrument he was.

Vodovozoff published in 1882 a very laudable and painstaking account of the Pougatcheffstchina, as the rebellion is called, in his *Otcherki iz Russkoy Istorii XVIII Veka* (St. Petersburg), to which we are mainly indebted for the following brief description:

It is unnecessary for our purpose to follow Vodovozoff's interesting résumé of the history of the Ural Cossacks, of the changes in their condition, brought about by Peter the Great,

before whose advent they had enjoyed independence and liberty, of their protests and grievances, of the Commission dispatched by Catherine II to inquire into these, of the exasperatingly tactless and procrastinating methods of the Commissioners, how this led to trouble, reprisals, and finally to open revolt, which was put down in the usual manner, by slaughtering the leaders and flogging the survivors, these latter events occurring in 1772.

Suffice it to say that Pougatcheff first made his appearance in the Ural steppes in 1772, the year of the troubles referred to. He was a Cossack of the Don who, in accordance with local custom, was married at the age of nineteen and immediately afterwards dispatched to the front to serve under Ataman Denisoff. This was long before the above-mentioned date, for the Seven Years War had not yet been concluded. Denisoff was so pleased with the courage Pougatcheff repeatedly displayed that he appointed him his orderly, but had him later severely flogged for losing the Ataman's horses. On the termination of the war the Cossack returned to home and domestic bliss, his wife presenting him with a son and daughter. Later he was sent to join the army in Poland, and was there selected to form part of an escort to bring back to their homes a party of dissenters. Returning to his homestead he was once more dispatched to the front, against the Turks this time, and was at the taking of Bender, after which he was invalided home. As indicative of the state of contemporary culture, it is worthy of note that Pougatcheff, who had now completed his career and had seen many foreign lands and even attained the rank of cornet, was absolutely illiterate and could neither read nor write.

One day Pougatcheff obtained leave to go to Taganrog to visit his sister who was married there. His brother-in-law, with two other Cossacks complaining of their grievances, proposed running away into the steppe and consulted him in the matter. Pougatcheff advised them to the best of his ability and returned home, but in the meantime the truant brother-in-law was caught and confessed that he had acted on the advice of Pougatcheff, who thereupon ran away also, and joined the Kuban Cossacks. Here he succeeded in inspiring such confidence that he was deputed to go to St. Petersburg and petition the authorities concerning their pay. On his way he was arrested and put in

irons, but succeeded in effecting his escape and sought refuge with his wife. The local Ataman got wind of his arrival, however, and he was rearrested. This was in the February of 1772. Whilst he was being taken to Tcherkask for trial he again made good his escape. This time he managed to get clear away across the Polish frontier, where he fell in with a Russian dissenter who advised him to become a dissenter himself and get sent back to Russia under another name. This he readily consented to do, and he obtained without difficulty a passport in the name of Emilian Ivanoff, purporting to be a Russian merchant. Whilst waiting for permission to return in this new capacity, and during the delay occasioned by the prevalence of the plague, Pougatcheff became acquainted with a soldier named Semennoff, and Kojevnikoff, a merchant. The latter told him he bore a remarkable resemblance to Peter III and advised him to go to the Ural, where the Cossacks were very discontented, raise the standard of revolt and proclaim himself to be the Emperor Peter III, who had been falsely reported dead. Semennoff would accompany him and bear witness that he was the real Emperor, and presently all the dissenters and all the dissatisfied would rally round him, and he would have no difficulty in ascending the throne and enforcing toleration of dissent.

This is Pougatcheff's own story, as contained in his deposition at his trial. It does not appear very probable on the face of it, nor did the authorities seem to attach much importance to it, for the people he implicated were acquitted by the court.

Arrived in the Ural district, the supposed Ivanoff began to stir up the Cossacks and to spread sedition. A loyal peasant betrayed him to the authorities, when he was seized and flogged until he confessed that he was no merchant and no Ivanoff, but a fugitive Cossack. He was then taken to Kazan and put in prison, pending the decision of the Supreme Government as to what was to be done to him. In Kazan he behaved so admirably that he excited universal sympathy, and succeeded in collecting from the charitable a respectable sum of money, which he concealed about his person. How a merchant took an interest in him, got him removed from the Government prison to the municipal gaol, and finally helped him to escape, is a long and interesting story. At first he hid in primeval forests, but later returned to the

his courage was rewarded. He dispatched a Cossack with his proclamation to the opposing force, and though their commander would not permit it to be read, half the Cossacks under his command deserted, the remainder fleeing back to the town. Pougatcheff's advisers made him hang eleven captured Cossacks, and, deciding to leave the town of Yaitska with its small force of regulars and its wavering population uncaptured, for they had no means of besieging or assaulting it, they marched on Orenburg, their numbers now swollen to 500. A small town on the route of their march surrendered to the insurgents, the Cossack inhabitants, coming out to meet them, handed over their Ataman, bound hand and foot. Pougatcheff asked them whether he had been a good Ataman to them, and on receiving a negative reply, hanged him. Here Pougatcheff caused the church bells to be rung and had himself proclaimed as Peter III. His forces had now increased to over 700, and he had captured several pieces of artillery on his way. Everywhere people believed him to be Peter III, and several who had been to St. Petersburg and had seen the late Emperor professed to recognize him. The popular imagination was now fully aroused.

Pougatcheff rapidly captured one fort after another, and in less than a fortnight from the date of the first proclamation he was already close to Orenburg. The commanders and officers of the forts he captured were all hanged, with their wives, and the garrison troops were converted into Cossacks, the guns and stores being taken. At one place Pougatcheff captured Brigadier-General Biloff, who was put to death. A very beautiful young woman, the wife of an officer and the daughter of Yelaguin, the commandant, Pougatcheff made his mistress. She was subsequently found dead in some bushes with her arms round the dead body of her infant brother.

Within twelve miles of Orenburg his following had swollen to 3000 men, and he had captured over 30 pieces of artillery, to say nothing of treasure and supplies. Before marching on Orenburg Pougatcheff decided to capture the smaller forts to the north of that town, and seems to have met with no opposition. In many cases the officers and men came out to meet him and to surrender, thus saving their lives. The whole district was smitten with terror; all the criminals and prisoners had been released,

and went about the country marauding and robbing. Pougatcheff gave himself up to the wildest debauchery. During one of his orgies in a small town he was surrounded by Bashkir irregulars, who had been dispatched to capture him, but such was the magnetism of the man and so great the magic of his fame, that even the besiegers surrendered.

The neighbouring forts having been taken, Pougatcheff now invested Orenburg, which had a garrison of over 3000 men with 70 guns who were joined by Brigadier-General Korff, with 2400 men and 20 guns. It seems incredible that these forces were unable to make mincemeat of the rebellious Cossacks who laid siege to the town for six months, from October 1773 to March 1774; but if these did not succeed in capturing the town this was not due in any measure to the prowess of its commander, but solely to the fact that Pougatcheff had scarcely any adherents there. Had he marched on the town at once, instead of wasting time in capturing and feasting in surrounding out-post forts, it is more than probable that he would have been able to take it without much difficulty, for the governor and commandant, Reinsdorp by name, appears to have been totally incompetent. Pougatcheff went into winter quarters in a small village some four miles from Orenburg. Here he had his headquarters, and hither there poured an almost endless stream of fugitives from factories—Bashkirs, Calmucks, Tartars, and every kind of vagabond and convict. According to Pougatcheff himself he had as many as 100,000 followers, although of these no more than from 2000 to 3000 were fully armed and equipped. The latter received pay, the rest of the disorderly crowd were armed with whatever they could find to hand, such as clubs, swords, pikes, pistols, bayonets mounted on sticks, etc., and lived on the country, marauding and stealing as they went. The army was divided into regiments, hundreds and tens, desertion was punished with death. Pougatcheff himself appointed patrols and sentries and saw that discipline was maintained, frequently riding out to make inspections on horseback even at night. He drilled his men every day, especially the artillery. Divine service was conducted by priests from the factories and mines, and on these occasions prayers were said for Peter III, but Pougatcheff himself never attended. Every description of supplies, including

money, drink, and food, were poured in, and the camp was full of the unhappy wives and daughters of officers. There was no limit to the wild debauchery and orgies that went on. The surrounding hollows and ditches were filled with the bodies of the killed and executed ; nearly every day there were executions. Pougatcheff held his Court and pronounced judgment in the open air, seated on a chair of *Stâte* looted from the governor of a neighbouring town. He was usually attired in red trousers and a red velveten fur coat, and wore a Cossack cap, and attended by two Cossacks—one with a silver hatchet, the other with a mace. The people who sought his aid bowed to the ground before him and kissed his hand. Pougatcheff had a trick of closing and twitching his left eye when he talked. To show his generosity he used to scatter coppers whenever he rode out. His immediate friends and intimates treated him in public with the greatest deference and ceremony, taking off their caps before him and calling him *His Majesty* ; but when they were alone with him the greatest intimacy and absence of formality prevailed, and they all used to get drunk together, sitting in their shirt-sleeves and singing Cossack songs. Pougatcheff was, in reality, absolutely in their power, and they did whatever they liked, often acting without his knowledge and even against his wishes.

While Pougatcheff was spending his time in riotous living and celebrating his nuptials with a beautiful young Cossack girl who was given the title of *Empress*, the Government were making preparations to quell the insurrection. Catherine dispatched an army to the relief of Orenburg, under the command of Bibikoff, who had given proofs of his ability in Poland and in crushing risings of miners. At a court ball held on the 30th November she had a prolonged and animated conversation with him, and next day his appointment was announced. Bibikoff proceeded as quickly as he could to Kazan, where he found everything in the greatest turmoil. The governor, senile and decrepit, had fled from the town, so had the majority of the gentry, and the whole country-side was in a state of panic. Bibikoff, writing to a friend, said :

“ The entire district of Orenburg and Samara represents one enormous Hell, and the inhabitants are in a woeful plight. There are so many dead bodies about, that even if there were any desire

to do so they could not all be buried. Corpses hang from gallows for months together and are so covered with snow that they cannot be recognized. Only the aged and infirm remain in the villages, and the very dogs have joined the insurgents. All the towns and fortresses are in the hands of Pougatcheff; the troops are insubordinate. No reliance can be placed on the local garrisons. These are all composed of wasters, rascallions, and poltroons, who will march as far as the next village and stop, sending back fearsome reports of how they are surrounded by the enemy, so that they have themselves to be rescued. They have actually put heart into the malefactors. Our plight is terrible. It is not that the enemy is dangerous, it is the vacillation of the people which is the real menace. It is not Pougatcheff who is to be feared but the prevailing discontent. As for Pougatcheff he is but a bogey, the plaything of the Cossacks. Moreover, we have everything against us, even the snow, the sleet, and the impassability of the roads."

Bibikoff had indeed the greatest difficulty in moving his troops over the soft snow. But his indomitable energy overcame all obstacles. He put life into the dispirited gentry of Kazan, who soon enrolled mounted men and returned to the town; their contagious example rapidly spread, even villages in the possession of the insurgents were captured, and news was received that the town of Samara, which had fallen into the hands of Pougatcheff, had been retaken. The siege of Orenburg was raised shortly afterwards, and one of Pougatcheff's lieutenants was caught and beheaded. Pougatcheff was now in full flight; and even his newly espoused wife was taken prisoner, as well as the famous Tchika. Unfortunately Bibikoff died of a fever in the April of 1774.

Pougatcheff, having fled to the Bashkir mines, there raised the standard of revolt and collected several thousand adherents; he was pursued by Michelson, who made his troops cross the swollen Ufa in boats and proceeded to march against the Bashkirs, whom he thrice defeated, continuing his march towards the mountains in pursuit of Pougatcheff. But the latter crossed the Ural Mountains, attacked the fortress of Magnitna, where he was at first repulsed and even wounded in the hand, and finally captured and looted it. Here he was joined by a force of 4000 men, in

addition to several bands of Cossacks. He continued his march, sacking forts and capturing guns as he went, successfully avoiding a regular force sent against him, which missed its objective and marched southward in an opposite direction. Pougatcheff's army now amounted to 10,000 men, and with these he burned and devastated all the towns on the march. In one place the wife of the commandant, who was accused of ill-treating her servants, was tied to the tail of a horse and dragged along the streets until she died. The Russian troops having discovered their mistake, rapidly returned through a district strewn with devastated towns and villages which marked the trail of Pougatcheff's bands. Encountering their prey they defeated the insurgents in spite of their leader's prodigies of valour. Although wounded, Pougatcheff escaped capture and turned a rout into an orderly retreat. Wherever he went he was joined by fresh supporters, and was soon able again to assemble an army, which he marched on Zlatoust. Here he encountered Michelson, who was surprised to meet so well-appointed an army, and at first mistook it for a force of regulars. Pougatcheff, however, soon laid all his doubts to rest by attacking his left flank and capturing two of his guns. This put Michelson on his metal; by a skilful use of his cavalry he completely crumpled up the Cossack irregulars and took all Pougatcheff's guns, cutting down 500 men, while a further 500 surrendered. Deprived of his guns and greatly reduced in numbers, Pougatcheff nevertheless made good his escape into the hills, and succeeded in getting clean away, raising fresh levies and marauding and devastating as before. Michelson, however, soon came across him again and once more inflicted a severe defeat upon him. But these repeated disasters did not appear to affect Pougatcheff in the least. After each defeat he always collected fresh supporters and reappeared as strong as ever. Michelson routed him on three subsequent occasions, but invariably with the same result. Meanwhile, these frequent actions, victorious though they were, commenced to have a crippling effect on the Russian general, who was compelled to call a halt in order to put his sick and wounded in hospital and take in ammunition and other supplies.

Pougatcheff's Cossacks, on the other hand, were also getting tired of this aimless roving and fighting, and clamoured to be taken to Moscow, whereat Pougatcheff would reply, "The time

is not yet." The Cossacks nevertheless began to circulate rumours to the effect that the Emperor Peter III was about to proceed to Moscow to take over his empire, and that his son Paul was impatiently awaiting him. Pougatcheff issued numerous proclamations in which the peasantry were promised the land of the gentry and complete liberty and independence, indeed, it was the democratic aspect of the rising which was throughout the real explanation of its phenomenal success. Hemmed in as he was from the south and the west no road lay open to Pougatcheff except the north, for there was no object in spreading over the inhospitable and virtually uninhabited regions east of the Urals. He therefore determined to march in a north-easterly direction, with the intention of swooping down on Kazan. In these evolutions it must be remembered that the extraordinary mobility of his bands gave him a very considerable advantage over regular troops.

In order to put the Government forces off the scent the report was put about that he intended to march on Ufa, which was on the direct road to Kazan, whither Michelson consequently promptly hastened. Pougatcheff, however, marched in a more northerly direction on the town of Ossa, where he was met by and defeated an army of 10,000 men. But the town itself made a stubborn resistance and repeatedly repulsed his assaults. He was on the point of setting fire to the town with loads of hay and straw, when the besieged sent out a retired guardsman to parley. This ingenuous person professed to recognize the Emperor Peter III in the person of Pougatcheff and advised surrender. The commandant received the victor on his knees, and was at first graciously treated; but one of his officers, Mineyeff by name, reporting that he had secretly written a letter warning Kazan,—the letter being actually produced,—the commandant was hanged and Mineyeff given the rank of colonel, in which capacity he led the insurgents to Kazan.

The march on Kazan was begun on the 23rd June, Pougatcheff having succeeded in capturing guns and ammunition. The garrison of Kazan consisted of no more than 1500 men, who occupied the forts, whilst the town itself was undefended. The story of the siege and sack of this important place need not be told in detail. After its capture Pougatcheff caused all the

loot he could collect to be brought into his camp, together with the local officials, whom he had severely flogged for oppressing the people. In Kazan an inconvenient episode occurred which would have put a less resourceful brain in a difficulty. His first wife happened to be in the town, and came out to claim and abuse him. Pougatcheff was, however, equal to the occasion; he explained the situation to her, and announced that she was the widow of a poor man called Pougatcheff who had been put to death for befriending him, and now, he added, "the miscreants actually have the audacity to say that I am that very Pougatcheff!" His legitimate wife, with her children, were taken care of and placed in Pougatcheff's travelling harem, consisting of eight beautiful girls of gentle birth.

Michelson had by this time got wind of his opponents' movements and hastened to the relief of Kazan, where Pougatcheff had now assembled some 25,000 men. With but 800 men, reinforced by 150 from the still untaken forts, the intrepid Russian commander inflicted defeat after defeat upon the rebel leader, even taking Mineyeff prisoner. This renegade officer was later sentenced to run the gauntlet till he died. Pougatcheff, however, got away, and was able to find shelter with 500 men in the primeval forests to the north-west. The loot from the town of Kazan was recaptured.

Suddenly the news spread that Pougatcheff had appeared on the Volga, capturing towns and marching on Nijni-Novgorod with a view to making straight for Moscow.

At this juncture there occurred a curious and amusing incident which, while of little importance in itself, throws an interesting light on the times. A certain merchant, Dolgopoloff by name, came to St. Petersburg to endeavour to obtain payment for fodder which he had supplied to the Government. Being unsuccessful in his mission he thought he would try his luck with Pougatcheff, and presented himself to him, ostensibly bearing gifts from Paul to his father. Pougatcheff received him kindly, promised to pay him his claim, and made full use of his pretended mission, which, of course, enormously raised the rebel's prestige in the eyes of his followers. By way of admonition, however, he showed Dolgopoloff how the gentry and oppressors of the people were hanged, and inspired him with a wholesome fear. As Pougatcheff had shrewdly suspected, Dolgopoloff

had conceived the plan of persuading the Cossacks to hand over their leader for a reward, in which he intended to share. The commercial enterprise of this enlightened Russian merchant received so rude a shock, however, when he saw how very effectively Pougatcheff dealt with those whom he regarded as undesirable, that he lost all inclination for his scheme, and longed to get away with a whole skin. For some time, however, the humorous rebel made this ingenious man-of-business accompany him before he let him go. Dolgopoloff took leave publicly and promised to convey to the Grand-Duke Paul his father's wish that he should come out to meet him. Pougatcheff then handed Dolgopoloff Rs.50, say five pounds, and told him that was all he could spare. Russian historians, in commenting on this incident, reflect with glee that the cunning merchant was no match for the wily Cossack leader. The end of Dolgopoloff was equally characteristic of the times. On his return to St. Petersburg he succeeded in obtaining an audience of Orloff, and produced a number of letters purporting to be signed by Pougatcheff's supporters, and offering to hand him over to the authorities for Rs.30,000. He even induced Orloff to take him before the Empress. The humours of this interview may be imagined. While Dolgopoloff gained a certain amount of credence by his obvious knowledge of Pougatcheff's circumstances he did not inspire confidence, and was not of course entrusted with the Rs.30,000 which he had ingenuously hoped would be handed him. Instead of that he was given an escort who formed a sort of commission for dealing with the Cossack leaders, with whom he was to bring them in touch. Dolgopoloff and his associates wandered about aimlessly in search of the Pougatcheff forces, and it can be imagined how very undesirous the merchant must have been to be brought face to face with those terrible Cossacks, who would recognize him at once. When finally he was unable to avoid the rebels any more, he innocently begged his commissioners to give him the money and allow him to hand it over to them. This, however, did not recommend itself as a business proposition, and so they only gave him one-tenth of the amount, with the promise that the remainder would be paid on delivery of Pougatcheff. Thankful for small mercies Dolgopoloff took what he could get and disappeared. His fate was pathetic, for he

was eventually caught, severely knouted, deprived of his nostrils, and condemned to hard labour for life.

When Pougatcheff's appearance on the Volga became known the Government was in great straits; the troops in the interior of Russia were inadequate, Nijni-Novgorod was nearly in as bad a plight as Kazan, and even Moscow was not much better off. It was reported that 80,000 of the dregs of the population were impatiently awaiting the advent of the rebel, whom they regarded as their saviour, and that the latter, having left 40,000 men at Kazan, was marching with another 40,000 on Moscow, whilst sending 40,000 to St. Petersburg. The wildest rumours were current.

Catherine hastily concentrated all the troops she could. Meanwhile, the false Peter III captured in succession all the principal towns on his route, including Penza and Samara. Everywhere the peasantry were emancipated and lavishly rewarded. It is a fact, greatly to the usurper's credit, that he made but little provision for himself; a sort of Russian Robin Hood on a large scale, he robbed the rich for the benefit of the poor, and this was indeed one of the secrets of his popularity. Gentlemen were publicly flogged for living on the labour of others.

Pougatcheff sent out in front of him various bands, each under the command of a leader who masqueraded as the usurper himself. It was not until he reached Tzaritzin that his forces met with any serious check; here, however, he suffered his final defeat, from which he never recovered. A fugitive, attended by his Cossacks, who had meanwhile grown tired of the aimless shedding of blood and arbitrary cruelties practised in his name, he was made a prisoner by his own adherents and delivered to the authorities.

Writing to her *souffre-douleur*, Grimm, on the 30th September 1774, Catherine informs him that Pougatcheff had been taken, bound, and securely locked up, and on the 24th October of the same year she writes that he was on his way "from Simbirsk to Moscow, bound and pinioned and cared for like a bear, to be hanged in that capital." As a matter of fact, Souvoroff, the famous general, who had taken command of the troops, had him put in irons and placed in a sort of cage mounted on a cart. When it was proposed to put him to the torture he made a full con-

fession on the first blow from the executioner's knout. On his way to Moscow he was well taken care of, and although he was sentenced to a terrible death, Catherine mercifully had him beheaded, but, according to the barbarous custom of the time, his body was subsequently quartered.

The Pougatcheff rising was one of the most remarkable phenomena of those times, and bears eloquent testimony to the prevailing discontent among the unfortunate and oppressed peasantry, the desperate condition of the dissenters, and the generally unsettled state of the country.

It has been maintained that Pougatcheff himself was neither avaricious nor cruel, that he was the tool of more astute and more vicious men, and that the most that he could be reproached with was weakness of character and absence of moral grit. But though he may not have been quite as bad as his career would lead one to conclude, he was certainly possessed of extraordinary craftiness, duplicity, and impudence, combined with courage and military ability of a high order, considering that he was absolutely illiterate.

CHAPTER XVIII

POTEMKIN AND THE FAVOURITES

WITH the suppression of the Pougatcheff rising Catherine may be said to have made her seat on the throne definitely secure. The terrible experiences of the people during that insurrection now caused them to long for quiet. Peter III had, by his various democratic measures, unsettled the minds of the lower classes and serfs, and by giving these unfortunates hope of an alleviation of their lot, had made them discontented and restless and an easy prey to any pretender. But Pougatcheff had taught them a lesson. His lieutenants and accomplices were little better than brigands, and those who escaped the cruelties and extortions of these lawless marauders were but too frequently punished and fined by the representatives of law and order. On the arrival of an armed force in a village, the villagers were called upon to declare for whom they were—Catherine or Peter III. Unless they knew for certain whether the armed men were regulars or insurgents they ran the greatest possible risk. There are many cases on record where the inoffensive peasants ignorantly declared for Peter when they should have declared for Catherine, or *vice versa*, and were unexpectedly and incontinently flogged. One such experience was enough to create a strong aversion to any form of rebellion and civil war, and thus, as the strong hand of the Government made itself felt, people soon lost all taste for sedition and discontent, and the exhausted country-side settled down with relief, not unmingled with fear, to peace and quietness.

It was at about this time, when Catherine may be described as having attained her zenith, that there appeared on the political firmament another luminary, an extraordinary meteor, an untutored and uncouth genius whose extravagancies and

eccentricities have made his name a sort of byword in history. This was the celebrated Gregory Potemkin (pronounced Potyomkin), who for so many years played the leading rôle in the Court and Government of Russia.

Gregory Alexandrovitch Potemkin was the son of an obscure and needy captain of many years' standing in a line regiment, without war service and without anything to raise him from the level of honest mediocrity. He settled in the neighbourhood of Smolensk, and here, on the 14th September 1739, Gregory was born. The Potemkins were believed to have been originally of Polish extraction, but they had been long settled in Russia; yet, with the exception of one who had been sent as ambassador to England by Peter the Great, no member of the family was ever known to have risen to distinction or even to have amassed a respectable competency.

In view of his father's straitened means young Potemkin was at first destined for the Church, and was sent to the Seminary in Moscow to prepare himself for his vocation. Here he acquired a good knowledge of theology and of the classics, French he had already learned at home. His intractable temper and the impetuosity of his character soon convinced his instructors, however, that he would find in the army a more congenial field for his energies. After a short stay in his father's house he was therefore sent to seek his fortune in St. Petersburg, and, armed with such introductions as could be got together, he succeeded in obtaining a cornetcy in the horse guards, where, however, for want of means, he had to groom his own horse and do similar menial drudgery, being unable to employ a servant. It now appeared that he would probably follow the traditions of his family and develop into a plodding but undistinguished soldier, for while he was scrupulously diligent in the performance of his duties, he exhibited no qualities calculated to attract the attention of his superior officers; on the contrary, he was pleasure-loving, dissolute, and wild. In the company of brother-officers better situated but not more dissipated than himself he led the life of a young man about town and made many influential friends, thanks to whom he got promotion and later became acquainted with the Orloffs, into whose set he was received, and whom he joined in the conspiracy against Peter III. It was Potemkin



POTEMKIN

who had charge of the escort which accompanied this unfortunate prince to Peterhof. Nor did he fail to secure his share of the rewards which Catherine subsequently so lavishly showered on her supporters. Promoted to the rank of colonel, and made a groom of the chambers, he was entrusted with the mission to announce to Count Ostermann, the Russian Ambassador at the Court of Stockholm, the change of ruler.

On his return from Sweden he took up his place at Court, and proceeded to ingratiate himself with the most influential of the Empress's entourage. He succeeded so well that he was soon admitted to those select and informal parties which have been described in a previous chapter. At these gatherings, where the Empress abandoned rigid etiquette and encouraged brilliancy of conversation, elegance, and wit, and tried to transplant the Paris *salon* to the banks of the Neva, many of those present were animated by ideas of a very different order and were intent only on their own advancement. The relations of Orloff and his Empress being common knowledge, it is not surprising that there were aspirants ready to supplant him. One of these was Potemkin. He imitated his rival's methods, and just as Orloff had gone about in former days languishing for a sight of his idol's eyes, and telling everybody with bold and calculated imprudence how deeply he was in love with her and worshipped the ground she walked on, so Potemkin made no secret of his real or pretended passion, and even insolently bragged about it. Any conventional amiability, any little word of condescension, any encouraging smile he might receive, he took care to spread abroad. This attitude, while it amused and flattered Catherine, very naturally excited the rage and apprehension of the honest Orloffs. These five brothers considered, rightly or wrongly, that Catherine had been put on the throne by them and was consequently their vested interest, to be jealously guarded. One day, when Potemkin was so imprudent as to call at Gregory Orloff's palace and there vaunt his passion, Alexis Orloff joined them, and in the course of conversation, one word leading to another, these distinguished courtiers came to blows, the two brothers seizing Potemkin, letting down his clothes, and fustigating him soundly as though he were a schoolboy. It was hoped that Potemkin would be unable to survive this disgrace at Court. The story goes that

in the preliminary scrimmage Potemkin's eye was accidentally gouged out, others say he gouged it out himself in order to look interesting, whilst, according to yet another account, it was knocked out by a racquet or tennis-ball. Whatever the truth may be, his adventure and accident made him still more interesting to Catherine.

Potemkin seems, however, to have taken his lesson to heart, and probably became more prudent for a time, for we hear of him as the boon companion of the impulsive Orloffs, who, though they might have been jealous and anxious about their position, were certainly free from anything resembling vindictiveness or that peculiar mental quality which makes it impossible for some people ever to forgive any one whom they may have done an injury. Whilst cultivating the friendship of the Orloffs, Potemkin kept his one eye on the main chance, and continued to pay assiduous court to the Empress, his ardour being, however, tempered by discretion, and he was rewarded by being promoted to the rank of chamberlain, a court title which conferred the rank of major-general. When the Turkish War broke out in 1769 he volunteered for the front, and was recommended, in an autograph letter from Catherine, to the good graces of the commander of the forces in the field, General Roumyantzeff.

The astute commander appointed him his aide-de-camp-general, and showed him every favour, but as he had no desire to share his military glories with this court upstart he neither gave him his confidence nor employed him on any important service, contenting himself with sending the Empress glowing accounts of her protégé's zeal and courage. Whilst this gave Catherine an excuse for promoting him to lieutenant-general, the purely ornamental position he enjoyed soon palled upon a man of Potemkin's ability. His endeavours and intrigues to supplant Prince Galitzin and obtain an independent command proving abortive, he lost interest in his work and succumbed to one of those fits of indolence to which his extraordinary and artistic temperament was so prone.

At this juncture he received news that Catherine had at last made up her mind to free herself from the Orloff yoke, and so Potemkin succeeded in causing himself to be sent to

St. Petersburg with dispatches, General Roumyantzeff being only too glad of an opportunity of getting rid of him. On his arrival at the capital he was most graciously received by his Sovereign, but found to his chagrin that Vassiltchikoff was already installed as favourite. He therefore retired in sulks from the Court to which he had so ardently desired to return. Astonished at this behaviour Catherine made inquiries and was told that a hopeless passion had caused him to fly all society, indeed, he went so far to retire to the monastery of Alexander Nevsky, where he declared he would take vows and become a monk. The announced intention was not merely a pretence. The early religious training of this extraordinary man had given him a certain strain of mysticism and superstition, and notwithstanding his excesses and the wildness of his life he had frequent attacks of religious fervour and devotion, when he was seized with a desire to seek in the cloister a refuge from the lures of the flesh and the temptations of the world.

Whether Potemkin was sincere in his protestation of piety or not, the sensibilities of Catherine were roused, her heart touched, and her vanity flattered. She dispatched her confidante, Countess Bruce, to the monastery to whisper hope and courage in his ear. Potemkin now returned to Court as impetuously as he had left it, only to find that, although Vassiltchikoff had been dismissed, Orloff was back and apparently reinstated. But Catherine was nevertheless genuinely in love with the magnetic and eccentric Cyclops, and after a few days of hesitation Orloff received in 1775 his final *congé* and Potemkin took his place.

In no position did Potemkin show himself more astute than in that of favourite. While his first solicitude was directed towards removing from the Court all whom he considered actual or potential enemies, he left no means unused for subduing the mind and keeping captive the heart of his imperial mistress. He was clever enough to know that constant adoration palls; skilfully, therefore, blending attentions with temper, he would sometimes display the most refined and delicate gallantry, and at others be rude and sulkily taciturn. Loaded with honours, and even more substantial pecuniary rewards, he got himself promoted to the rank of general and did not rest until he

obtained his field-marshal's baton above the heads of his seniors. He left nothing undone to secure the unlimited confidence of his Sovereign, which facilitated the disgrace of his rivals. His general demeanour offered a striking contrast to the unassuming modesty of his predecessor. He occupied in the Imperial Palace the favourite's apartments, which communicated with those of the Empress by means of a private staircase, and often, when surrounded by courtiers, he would suddenly quit them, arrayed in his dressing-gown, to visit Catherine. By thus ostentatiously exhibiting his intimacy he made himself nearly as feared and respected as the Sovereign. His antechamber was crowded with the greatest nobles and highest officials in the land, whom, however, he did not always deign to receive. Whilst haughty with the great, he was strangely accessible to humbler petitioners, who by servility and flattery often obtained for themselves favours the more exalted would not have ventured to solicit. His splenetic humour was nevertheless incalculable, and was a source of frequent disappointment. Thus his secretary one day made a bet that he would get him to sign at a sitting papers which had been fruitlessly awaiting his signature for six months. With glee he returned from his interview with the whole batch of papers signed, only to discover that his whimsical chief had affixed the name of the secretary, instead of his own, to each of the papers.

Not content with the title of Count, which had been conferred upon him, he induced the Empress to persuade Joseph II of Austria to create him a prince of the Holy Roman Empire.

To a temperament like that of Potemkin the honours and luxuries of his life as favourite soon became positively nauseous. His ungovernable character could not stand for long the silken cords of bondage, however splendid, and his original mind, ever fertile in expedients, began to search for a pretext for regaining his freedom. Feigning indisposition, he was himself instrumental in finding his own successor, whom he was careful to select from amongst his creatures.

It is a curious fact, not without its moral, perhaps, that Catherine was extraordinarily unfortunate in her love affairs; most of her lovers were faithless and generally tired of her

before she grew weary of them. Of course, in the majority of cases, their affection for her was more a question of advancement and ambition than of love, nevertheless, she seems to have actually bored her lovers. This may be explained, no doubt, by her being an exacting mistress and by the low state of culture of the majority of the soldiers of fortune from whom her selections were made. Nevertheless, it is permissible to assume from all the available records, such as private letters, memoirs, etc., that Catherine, in spite of her unquestionable genius, must have been rather a trying companion and even on occasion somewhat of a bore. Her desire to pose as a brilliant writer and a witty conversationalist often betrayed her into puerilities and poor and pinchbeck jokes which were, of course, expected to pass for pure gold. If we add to this a tendency to pedantry and a deplorable desire to educate the objects of her affection, whom she was rather inclined to treat as irresponsible children, we shall readily understand how irksome the position of favourite must in time have become.

Whatever the reason may be, whilst Catherine loved Potemkin without reserve, and continued to do so platonically to the day of his death, he soon wearied of her, and succeeded in shaking himself free in two years. To be able to do this and retain her affection and respect afterwards was perhaps one of the greatest achievements of this unconventional and truly extraordinary man.

His subsequent career was a record of deeds, which still loom large in history, and of extravagancies at least as stupendous.

It is generally believed that it was he who inspired the mind of his mistress with the noble dream to revive the Byzantine Empire and crown herself at Constantinople. In that dream lay the germs of that Slavonic idea which was to develop into a whole system of political thought later to be known as Pan-Slavism. This dream, like that of Napoleon, a dream of world conquest and universal supremacy, may seem ridiculous to English readers. While we were doing the spadework of empire building, digging the foundations, as it were, Potemkin lay dreaming on his sofa, arrayed in his dressing-gown and slippers, yet he would be a bold man who would venture to

prophesy that the impulse thus given by an impracticable dreamer was destined to end in the smoke from whence it originated. The destiny of the Russian Empire is still on the knees of the gods, but its growth and development within the last century is truly astounding. While other countries have prospered by victories, the progress of Russia seems to have proceeded from defeat to defeat. Like a phoenix from its ashes it would appear to arise more powerful and prosperous after every fresh disaster. The character of Potemkin, like that of the nation which he governed, was a strange contradiction of indolence and energy, of heroism and self-indulgence, of disinterestedness and greed, of idealism and sensuality. He was a monster, but a very human monster, who possessed, on a grand and exaggerated scale, all the vices and virtues, all the strength and all the weakness, of human nature. No doubt it was this pre-eminently human aspect of him which endeared him to his mistress, who, with all her faults and failings, was at heart a philosopher, a profound thinker, for the times she lived in, who, while she never forgot that she was an Empress, was always equally conscious of her frailty and her sex, and regarded, theoretically at least, the entire human race as one great if disunited family.

We will not dwell upon the political achievements of Potemkin, his wars with Turkey, his conquest of the Crimea and of what to-day is called Southern Russia; his extraordinary and almost legendary journey through Kherson, on which the Empress accompanied him, and the device of arranging moving villages to precede them on their progress in order to conceal from her how he had misappropriated the funds confided to him for the regeneration of those barren wastes; nor of his reorganization of the army on a basis more suitable to the Russian spirit. Suffice it to say that Potemkin was a genius who adorned whatever he touched and yet left a lasting mark on nothing. His name to-day is chiefly associated in the Russian mind with a certain dish which the French still call *salade russe*, and the Russians the porridge of Potemkin; with pineapple as the principal ingredient, it is characteristic alike of the originality and of the extravagance of this statesman who was at once a minister of *opéra bouffe* and a hero of history.

In order to keep Catherine amused, and leave himself a free hand to carry out his schemes and indulge his eccentricities, he kept her supplied with favourites, and as soon as any one of these threatened to assume a dangerous ascendancy or to be incapable of any longer absorbing all her attention and interest, quickly another was provided, likewise introduced by him. And in this way Potemkin succeeded in making himself the true fountain, if not of honour, at least of favour. Unfortunately for his fame, these introductions were not gratuitous, and the fortunate person on whom the temporary choice of the Empress might fall was expected, and indeed compelled, to pay a suitable commission. Potemkin, while directing the affairs of the State, did not scorn to act the part of procurer, nor to take the fee which is the pimp's reward.

But Potemkin had a mind far above the narrow prejudices of the conventional. He was, on the contrary, honestly and cynically contemptuous of respectability. Openly and grossly immoral himself, he made no pretence to assume virtues he did not possess. He was indeed a contrast to the modest Orloff of limited intelligence, whose private conduct and morals were scarcely more exemplary, but who lacked the brutal cynicism of his genial and terrible successor.

Catherine, as we have seen, had strong leanings towards refinement and culture; she was for ever trying to educate her statesmen, and to elevate the tone of her Court. That this was a most desirable and necessary endeavour has, we think, been sufficiently demonstrated. The advent of Potemkin, however, seems to have had a distinctly reactionary influence on the morals and ideals of contemporary Russian society. Indeed, the demoralization which wherever he went he seemed to spread around him, like some mephitic emanation, continued to the reign of Alexander I.

Potemkin died in 1791 from fever. The war undertaken jointly with Austria against Turkey in 1788 had been brought at last to a glorious conclusion by Repnin, in spite of the desertion of Austria, and Potemkin, whom the Empress had fruitlessly ordered to the seat of war, now proceeded post-haste to the front. The disorder from which he was suffering, and which he had vain-gloriously neglected, arrested his journey, the air of his

carriage seemed to stifle him, and he was laid on his cloak by the roadside, where he appropriately died in the arms of one of his nieces. When Catherine received the news she fainted three successive times, and had to be bled to bring her to. It is said that she never recovered his loss, and henceforth manifested for ever after the weakness and irresolution of a woman bereft of her support. She had indeed accustomed herself to lean more or less on this Minister for over fifteen years, but it is an exaggeration to say that it was the death of Potemkin that weakened her character and shook her resolution. There were other contributing causes, amongst which the outbreak of the French Revolution and her ever-failing health were not the least ; moreover, she did not survive him many years, for in 1796 she herself breathed her last.

This is perhaps a convenient place for giving a short résumé of the lovers whom Potemkin so paternally provided for his Sovereign and as arbitrarily removed from her.

Zavadovsky, the first of these, young, handsome, and vigorous, was not permitted to retain her favour ; he had been a secretary, and after his dismissal he continued to be employed in the affairs of the Cabinet, and was even made a privy councillor.

Potemkin's choice next fell on a Servian Adonis, Zoritch by name, who repaid his protector by quarrelling with him and even challenging him to a duel. He thus foolishly prepared his own fall. Coarse and uncultured, he was unable to obtain any influence over the mind of Catherine, and consequently could make no stand against the Minister he had provoked. He remained in favour for no more than a twelve-month, after which he was loaded with favours and given the governorship of a town, where he kept a sort of semi-regal state, founded a school for cadets, gambled and enjoyed himself until, after his Sovereign's death, he was recalled to Court by Paul.

Korsakoff, a guardsman, was next selected for favour, but also incurred the enmity of Potemkin. This Minister had long borne a grudge against Countess Bruce, the sister of General Roumyantzeff, with whom Korsakoff was on terms of affection. A trap was laid for the couple, and Catherine surprised them in each other's arms. With the calm dignity and self-restraint so characteristic of the Empress, she withdrew without saying a

word, but never again saw either of them. This was the extent of her vengeance.

The most engaging and pathetic of Catherine's lovers was Lanskoj, also a guardsman, who succeeded Korsakoff, and seems to have been deserving of the great affection and devotion which he inspired. He is frequently referred to in Catherine's letters to Grimm. Popular with all who knew him, it is believed that Potemkin, seeing how deeply he was loved, began to fear him and caused him to be poisoned. Be this as it may, he certainly died in frightful agonies and in Catherine's arms, her lips receiving his last breath. She had very tenderly nursed him, and on his death experienced the most violent grief, shutting herself up for several days. The doctor who let him die was upbraided, and a beautiful mausoleum was erected for him at Tzarskoye Selo. Catherine went into mourning and wore widow's weeds, nor would she hear of any one to console her and take his place for a whole year. It is said that the relations were purely platonic, owing to the physical infirmity of the unfortunate Lanskoj.

A year later, however, she was induced to make yet another choice. Yermoloff, whom Potemkin now recommended, was the least striking and the least amiable of all the holders of this coveted post. He succeeded, however, in pleasing his mistress, whereupon he had the temerity to range himself on the side of his protector's enemies, and even became the instrument of their intrigues. Potemkin was not a man to tolerate a real rival, and impetuously called upon Catherine to choose between "that white nigger," as he called Yermoloff, and himself. Catherine did not hesitate an instant, and so this imprudent favourite promptly received his *congé*; he had continued in office for less than two years in all.

Potemkin now cast his eyes upon Momonoff, a captain in the guards, who it seems had been languishing for the imperial favour. A man of regular features, but sallow complexion and indifferent figure, Catherine did not at first appear inclined to follow Potemkin's recommendation. The latter asked her to allow him to send Momonoff to her with some drawings, adding that he would take her comments on the drawings as an indication of her opinion of the man. Catherine thereupon received

the aspirant, whom Potemkin had already made his aide-de-camp, and after attentively examining him returned the drawings with the remark that though the outlines were beautiful the colouring was bad. However, she at last decided to give way to Potemkin's importunate entreaties on his protégé's behalf. In spite of his sallow complexion Momonoff appears to have had an amiable disposition, and succeeded in inspiring his mistress with genuine affection. But Catherine was no longer in her first youth, she was verging on sixty, and her charms were fading. She had even in her youthful days failed to retain for long the vagrant fancies of her volatile admirers. In Momonoff she was once more to suffer humiliation and disappointment. This young adventurer now confessed that he had lost his heart to a Princess Stcherbatoff and desired to marry her. With many searchings of heart, much pride, and an imperial generosity, Catherine blessed the happy pair, was present at their wedding, and sent them to live in Moscow loaded with presents. It is of course natural that the Empress did not wish them to remain at St. Petersburg. Anent this marriage the scandal-mongering Masson, most of whose stories have since been discredited, relates that Momonoff had the bad taste to tell his wife some intimate details concerning Catherine which placed the Empress in an undignified if not a ridiculous light, and that these were imprudently repeated by his wife to third parties, who, envious of Momonoff's luck, were not loath to report them to the right quarter. One night the newly-married pair were surprised by the arrival of the Chief of Police with six women, or rather men in women's clothes, who made Momonoff kneel on the ground while they proceeded to apply birch rods to his bride's naked body. After she had received a sound whipping, the Chief of Police, who had meanwhile discreetly retired, re-entered the room and explained to the couple that this was the way the Empress punished a first indiscretion ; for a second, the penalty was Siberia.

Catherine's next and last favourite was wittily described as her platonic lover, because of his name. This was Platon Zuboff, a young lieutenant in the horse guards, who was of medium stature, but supple, muscular, and symmetrical, with a high and intelligent forehead and fine eyes. He spoke French



PLATON ZUBOFF

fluently, had some education, was of polite and pliant disposition, could converse on literary subjects, and practised music. He did not owe his advancement to Potemkin, but to chance. When the rupture with Momonoff took place he happened to be in command of the guard which attended the Empress at Tzarskoye Selo, and he was so fortunate as to attract Catherine's favour. Catherine is said, even by her most censorious and calumnious biographers, to have treated him more like a son than a lover, and took upon herself the care of his education. She was indeed sixty years of age at the time. In a letter to Grimm of the 13th September 1790 she tells him how she and Zuboff were engaged in translating Plutarch into Russian. On the 22nd October 1792 she complains to Grimm that she is "Madame la Ressource," and has once more to train people for the State, adding that the two brothers Zuboff are the most promising, although the eldest is in his twenty-fourth year and the younger is barely twenty; nevertheless, she says, "they have brains and understanding, and the eldest possesses an 'infinite' amount of knowledge, and everything arranges itself admirably in his mind; he is really clever."

On the 9th May 1792 she writes of Zuboff that he is hard-working, honest, willing, with most excellent gifts; "he is a man," she says, "whom you will hear talked of: it only depends upon me to make of him another factotum." In a later letter dated 6th April 1795 we get a pretty picture of a family group. She excuses herself for the shortness of her epistle by explaining to Grimm that she has to assist at an amateur concert at which her grandson, the Grand-Duke Alexander (afterwards Alexander I) and Count Platon Zuboff will play the violin, the Grand-Duchesses Elizabeth, Alexandra, and Helen will sing, and Maria, who is only nine, will accompany on the harpsichord. This young Princess is described as having a very genius for music, and as being generally most clever and bright, full of fun, and as dancing like an angel. The parents are referred to as the heavy luggage, and are stated to have gone to Gatchina three days ago, at which there is an expression of relief, and the reflection, "When the cat is away the mice will play." It is perhaps interesting to note that the Grand-Duchess Elizabeth, the wife of Alexander, who was so pathetically beautiful, inspired

Zuboff with a hopeless passion. For the rest, this, the last of the favourites, was also the vainest and the most insolent.

One of her scurrilous biographers (Masson) does Catherine the justice to say that :

“ It is a very remarkable feature in the character of Catherine that none of her favourites incurred her hatred or her vengeance, though several offended her, and their quitting their office did not depend on herself. No one was ever punished, no one ever persecuted. Those whom she discarded went into foreign countries, to display her presents and dissipate her treasures, after which they returned, to enjoy her liberalities with tranquillity in the bosom of their country, though their formidable mistress could have crushed them in a moment. In this respect Catherine certainly appears superior to all other women.” The writer then proceeds to compare her to her advantage with Queen Elizabeth of England and Queen Christina of Sweden.

Nevertheless, this scurrilous writer has blackened the memory of Catherine by asserting that she formed in her later years a coterie called the Little Society, in which she celebrated her most secret mysteries. “ The particulars of these amusements are not,” he says, “ fit to be repeated, and the public will lose nothing worth preserving by their remaining concealed. The author has burned all his memoranda which could have afforded any information on the subject.” *Splendide mendax !*

Any one who has any knowledge of court scandal will know how the merest trifle is often twisted into a terrible legend, and that the small and select intimate parties of the Empress should have given rise to envy and exercised the fertile imagination of the gossips need surprise nobody. What is surprising is that a writer of the standing of Waliszewski, while professing to disbelieve these stories, nevertheless hesitates to contradict them and throws out still more unsavoury suggestions.

CHAPTER XIX

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

IN spite of Panin, who virtually held that office, Catherine may be said to have been practically her own Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and in spite of that same indolent statesman, Catherine commenced her reign with a strong bias in favour of friendly relations with England, a bias which Waliszewski attributes to the early friendship with, and the pleasant recollections of, Sir Charles Hanbury Williams. Brückner justly maintains that the friendly relations with England during the first Turkish War largely contributed towards its successful issue. In 1766 the famous commercial treaty, which presented such difficulties to so many British diplomatists, was at length concluded, and the enmity between France and England was as favourable to the interests of Russia as was the hostility of Austria during the early years of Catherine's reign. The War of American Independence was equally welcome to her. So long as England had her hands full in the West she could presumably ill afford to interfere with Russia's designs in the East. England even looked to Russia for aid against her rebellious colonial subjects, but this Catherine refused in a letter to George III.

The imperially minded Catherine on more than one occasion expressed her opinion of the supineness and weakness of a Government unable to retain its colonies and punish rebellion. When contemptuously discussing these "drapers," as she derisively called the British Ministers, the mistakes which she considered they had committed in the war with France, and the incompetence of George III, Catherine would state her inability to understand how Great Britain could ever become reconciled to the loss of such important territory as the American colonies repre-

sented. When Fitzherbert explained to Ségur in her presence that the loss of these colonies, so far from being a misfortune, would turn out to the advantage of his country, Catherine was frankly astounded that so able a diplomatist could perpetrate such an absurdity.

This attitude led to a certain coolness between the two countries. The failure to conclude an offensive and defensive alliance had already made the position of Harris anything but easy, and the attempt to enlist the forces of Russia against France proved equally unsuccessful. While Orloff and Potemkin were prepared to support England diplomatically and act as intermediaries for her in her negotiations with France and Spain, Catherine sided with Panin in opposing such action, considering that England was more in need of the friendship of Russia than was the latter of that of England.

The coolness between the two countries was of course increased by Russia's famous declaration of armed neutrality in 1780, which, as Catherine has solemnly asserted, was her own original idea, conceived with the object of protecting her trade and shipping from the depredations of belligerents and England's assumed right of search. Frederick the Great, in a letter full of the high-flown compliment so characteristic of the eighteenth century, acknowledges her claim to originality, and praises her for having, after giving laws to the largest empire of the world, dictated them to the "mistress of the sea." Russian historians go so far as to say that by this proclamation for the protection of neutral shipping Catherine laid the foundation to Russia's attitude with reference to international law.

The policy of Catherine had the inevitable result of improving the relations between Russia and France and drawing these two countries closer to each other, in which the able diplomacy of Ségur was an important contributing factor.

This change in the foreign policy of Russia, which took place in 1780, had a reflex action on her relations with Prussia. The friendly correspondence between Catherine and Frederick soon ceased entirely, and that veteran's nephew and successor, Frederick William II, for whom Catherine had a profound contempt, did nothing to improve the existing strained relations. In her letters to Grimm, Catherine refers to this corpulent monarch

as "frère Gu" (Guillaume) and George III as "frère Ge," and describes the friendly alliance between the two as "gegu" and "geguisme." While Catherine was thus ridiculing the two leading Protestant monarchs of Europe and complaining about them, Potemkin was for ever insisting on the importance of retaining the friendship of these two countries.

The behaviour of England and Prussia in connection with Turkey and Sweden was indeed calculated to excite the hostility of Catherine. She was well aware that Gustavus III would never have gone to war had he not relied on the assistance of these two countries. Indeed, with a view to saving Turkey, the Cabinets of London and Berlin welcomed the Swedish imbroglio. Elliot, the British Minister to Berlin, pointed out how necessary it was to place a limit to the expansion of Russia. Catherine in her letters to Potemkin constantly complains of the arbitrary conduct of England and Prussia, whilst the statesman as constantly urges her, in his replies, to refrain from quarrelling with these countries, counselling forbearance, prudence, and patience.

It is interesting to note how clearly Russian historians judge the situation. As Brückner, for instance, pertinently remarks, the combined action of England and Prussia might conceivably have become most disastrous to Russia. Indeed the subsequent diplomacy of Russia, especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century, has been largely animated by a desire to prevent any such co-operation.

The wars with Sweden and Turkey were a heavy drain on the resources of Russia, whose finances were already disordered and whose population was exhausted. Catherine regarded Pitt and Frederick William of Prussia as her personal enemies. While the former was engaged in an endeavour to save Turkey from the rapacity of Russia and Austria, Prussia was trying to prevent her neighbour from still further increasing her influence in Poland, and was taking the part of Sweden against her.

Gustavus III, the youthful King of Sweden, thirsting for glory, was anxious to recover from his neighbour those Finnish Provinces which had been so ruthlessly conquered by her. Soon after the accession of Catherine she did all in her power to support the

limitation of the monarchy in Sweden and to maintain the constitution of that country. Gustavus III, who as heir to the throne had exhibited his strong desire to strengthen the powers of the crown, succeeded in 1771, and his assumption of the reins of government caused Russia no little perturbation. Ostermann, the Russian Envoy at Stockholm, dispatched a courier post-haste to St. Petersburg for funds, and Catherine wrote to Panin urging him to send the money at once, and to prevent by all possible means the establishment of an absolute monarchy in Sweden, the result of which would be a war with Russia supported by French intrigues and gold. During the early years of the reign of the young King of Sweden, war between the two countries was always imminent. The King, however, succeeded in overthrowing the constitution in the following year.

In 1777 the King visited St. Petersburg. His refinement and culture, his love of French literature, his ambitious character, and the splendour to which he was addicted, were all traits which he had in common with Catherine, who appears to have admired the qualities of his mind, the strength of his will, and his keen perception; nevertheless, the visit did not have the effect of drawing the two rulers more closely together, and although Catherine deployed all her charms, presented him with a substantial sum of money, and after his departure entered into direct correspondence with him, no mutual confidence was established. At first Gustavus thought that he had succeeded in obtaining all his objects, but soon his Envoy in Russia warned him to place no trust in the sincerity of the Empress, and assured him that the latter had but little faith in his friendship. Indeed, the brilliant but somewhat flighty King failed to produce a serious impression on the Russian Court, and while he flattered himself that he had won Catherine over to his views, her Envoy in Stockholm was making common cause with his enemies of the constitutional party, assuring them that they might rely upon Russian support in the event of a rising. When in 1779 Gustavus proposed an alliance, Catherine refused, on the pretext that she feared to incur the displeasure of England and France. The King was thus made to feel that war was inevitable, and the sooner he could march upon St. Petersburg and dictate his terms there the better. For all that, he kept on assuring Catherine

that he loved peace and hated war, and that his country was in need of tranquillity.

In 1783 a second meeting of the two monarchs took place, this time in Finland, lasting however but a few days. On this occasion the mutual impression appears to have been less agreeable. Catherine in her letters to Joseph II and Potemkin complained of the vain-gloriousness of the King, of his want of sincerity and his meticulous pettiness. Gustavus equally frankly confessed to Leopold of Tuscany that he had been disappointed in Catherine. In 1783 Catherine wrote to the King to say that she had heard he intended invading Finland and marching to St. Petersburg in order, no doubt, to take supper with her. She added, however, that she attached no importance to such baseless imaginative gossip.

In the meantime, while Russian generals were travelling in Finland and reconnoitring the country, Russian diplomatists continued intriguing with the constitutional party in Stockholm, until Gustavus, who had been held in leash, as it were, by France, anxious to prevent hostilities, felt impelled by the instinct of self-preservation to declare war in 1788, having previously drawn closer to Turkey in the hopes of reviving an old treaty with that country which had fallen into abeyance.

The time for curtailing the power of Russia seemed indeed to have arrived. While the subsidies of France had placed Gustavus in the position to put his naval and military forces on a satisfactory footing, he thought that his attitude in regard to Turkey and Poland justified him in counting on the gratitude of England and Prussia, who were on terms of coolness with the Empress.

Catherine fully understood the situation and was disturbed. Her secretary Khrapovitski entered in his diary that she was in low spirits, and some say she even wept. It was ascertained that Gustavus, not content with his design of marching on St. Petersburg, had conceived the most ambitious plans and contemplated the reconquest of the Baltic Provinces as well as of Finland. Moreover, Russia was but ill prepared for war with Sweden, her northern frontier being virtually denuded of troops ; it was even proposed to withdraw some of the forces operating against Turkey. Russia's strongest hope lay in a possible

rising in Sweden : the re-establishment of a constitution and the gratitude of the nobles.

Meanwhile Gustavus lost his head in a fit of vain-glorious pride, and at the thought of the defeat of Russia and the reconquest of the territories Charles XII had lost to Peter the Great, he became as one intoxicated. He had no misgivings, doubts, or anxieties, but boasted of his intention to raze to the ground the famous statue of Russia's first and greatest Emperor, which Catherine had so recently erected, and promised the ladies of the Swedish Court to invite them to the splendid fêtes he intended to celebrate at Peterhof.

Catherine complained with reason to Count Ségur of the madness and folly of the King. Ségur replied that he thought the King of Sweden, deluded by deceptive dreams, imagined that he had already gained three important victories ; to which the Empress rejoined that even if he had captured St. Petersburg and Moscow, she would have shown him what could be done by a woman of strong character at the head of a brave and loyal people standing at bay on the ruins of a great empire. She composed French verses lampooning the King, and even wrote an opera which was repeatedly produced at the Hermitage Theatre in which he was ridiculed in mock-heroics. Gustavus III was accused by her of creating a *casus belli* by disguising a handful of his troops in Russian uniforms and causing them to burn a few frontier villages. There is even reason to believe that this allegation was not unfounded, and that the King did indeed have recourse to so despicable a stratagem, in spite of which his contemporaries and posterity alike have agreed to regard him as the aggressor in this foolish war. The military operations were conducted within too close a vicinity of St. Petersburg for the comfort of Catherine, who in her uneasiness declared that Peter the Great had placed his capital too near the frontier. The Swedish general, however, did not prove insensible to pecuniary arguments ; and the Scottish commander of the Russian fleet, Admiral Greig, drove the Swedish fleet into harbour, where he blockaded it.

The officers of the King's army expressed their unwillingness to fight, basing their attitude on the illegality of the war, which had been entered on without the consent of Parliament. They addressed a petition to the King in which they demanded the

conclusion of peace and the convocation of the estates of the realm, and at the same time issued a proclamation to their fellow-subjects protesting against a war undertaken in violation of the laws of the country. While the King in despair talked of abdicating and repeated the famous words of Francis I that all was lost save honour, the Empress was accused of bribing the Swedish officers, a charge which has been proved to be unfounded. At the same time Denmark, who had an offensive and defensive alliance with Russia, was at last prevailed upon to send an army against Sweden, an act which contemporary diplomatists insisted on regarding as no breach of neutrality. Put on his metal, the King of Sweden unexpectedly developed a heroism with which he hitherto had not been credited. He succeeded, by summoning the nation to arms, in arresting the advance of the Danes and in suppressing the incipient mutiny of his officers, the principal leaders of which fled to Russia, whilst those who could not escape were court-martialled. Supported by his people, who were not anxious to see a return to power of the aristocracy, the King enlisted the sympathies of England and Prussia, who peremptorily intervened and threatened an invasion of Denmark unless that country at once suspended hostilities.

Thus by the end of 1788 Catherine found herself in a position of some difficulty. At war simultaneously with Turkey and Sweden, she saw with some dismay the possibility of the active enmity of England and Prussia. Austria had her hands full in the Netherlands, and the affairs of France were critical. With varying fortunes the war with Sweden dragged its course, until in 1790 a severe defeat of the Russians enabled Gustavus, who was as heartily sick of the protracted and undecisive military operations as Catherine, to listen to peace. The Spanish Envoy at St. Petersburg acted as intermediary, so that neither side was placed in the invidious position of appearing to make the first overtures, and the terms eventually obtained may be described as a reversion to the *statu quo ante*—in other words, it was a case of "as you were," with the important difference that Gustavus had asserted his right to act as he chose in his own country and was free from Russian interference. Two years later the aristocratic party which he had defied assassinated their King. Catherine was delighted at the termination of the

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war, and in announcing the joyful news to Potemkin wrote : " We have succeeded in pulling one paw out of the mud ; as soon as we get out the other we shall sing Halleluiah." In another letter she tells him that since 1784 all her clothes had been getting too loose for her, but that since the conclusion of peace she had during the last three weeks been steadily putting on flesh, and was also in much better spirits.

Nevertheless, her other paw was still deeply embedded in the mud. In 1787 she had again commenced hostilities against Turkey, with Austria for her ally and with grand and ambitious ideas at the back of her head. These dreams were not destined to be realized, and Constantinople never fell into her hands although she kept hoping to the last. Now it was that sailor of fortune, Paul Jones, who was going to capture the old Byzantine capital by sea ; now it was Potemkin who was on the point of taking it on land. But all these hopes were doomed to disappointment. The aid of Austria had also been rather languid, and after a time entirely ceased. The death of Joseph II in 1790 effected a considerable change on the European political firmament. That Emperor's relations had largely ascribed the misfortunes which had latterly overtaken his country to his friendship with Catherine, whose faithful friend and ally he had remained, from the time he came under the spell of her charm, on the occasion of his visit to Russia, and his famous journey south with her and Potemkin, until the day of his death. When that occurred Catherine was so deeply affected that she was unable to meet the Austrian Ambassador, according to her own letter to Grimm, without bursting into tears.

With the accession of Leopold II a great change came over the attitude of Austria, to the advantage of Prussia and the detriment of Russia. Whilst the pacific tendencies of this Emperor contributed to soften the diplomatic asperities between Catherine and England and Prussia, it also led him to suspend hostilities against Turkey, and to leave Russia to continue the war unaided. The Treaty of Yassa was the inevitable consequence of the defection of Austria, yet Russia could congratulate herself on her achievements and the important advantages she secured. Only a brief period was to elapse before, on the ruins of the Turkish fortress of Hadji-Bey, there was to arise the beautiful town of

Odessa, to be planned and administered by the Duc de Richelieu. But Catherine regretted that the conclusion of peace had stopped her fleet from taking Constantinople, and that she had not succeeded in putting an end to the existence of Turkey as a state. She was disappointed with the terms of peace, which were far from realizing the hopes she had cherished, although they are described by Russian historians as most satisfactory.

Catherine was to experience a yet more annoying disappointment. After the conclusion of peace with Sweden the friendly relations between the King and the Empress were resumed, and the project of a matrimonial alliance between the Crown Prince of Sweden and the Grand-Duchess Alexandra, Paul's daughter, which was even said to have been a secret article in the treaty, was now warmly espoused by Catherine. Indeed the young Grand-Duchess was educated and grew up in the expectation of one day becoming Queen of Sweden. The charms and accomplishments of young Gustavus were constantly repeated to her, and the Empress frequently made jocular allusions to her future intended. One day, it is related, she opened a portfolio of portraits of princes and asked her granddaughter to select the one she preferred. Alexandra unhesitatingly chose the one which bore the name of Gustavus, and Catherine, little suspecting that she had read the inscription, now made up her mind that the match was predestined.

The entourage of young Gustavus seem to have been equally anxious to inspire him with similar sentiments. At this juncture Gustavus III was murdered, and his brother, the Duke of Sudermania, became Regent. This Prince did not at first favour the match, but on the contrary proceeded to arrange a marriage for the young King with a Mecklenburg Princess. His Envoy whom he dispatched to Russia to announce the intelligence was informed that the Empress would not receive him, and in her rage she instructed her representative at Stockholm to deliver to the Regent a note in which she reproached him for entering into an alliance with France, which she regarded as disloyal to her, and even hinted that she suspected him of being privy to his brother's assassination. It is a curious circumstance that the Regent finally allowed himself to be intimidated, and that Budberg, the Russian diplomatist who had just found a bride for

the Grand-Duke Constantine, was allowed to proceed to Mecklenburg to negotiate a renunciation, and then sent to Stockholm, where it was arranged that the King's marriage should be postponed until he was of age, and that he should meanwhile pay a visit to St. Petersburg, Catherine hinting, concerning him and her granddaughter, that "if, as it has been said, the two children have a mutual affection already, and should they on meeting still be agreeable, means may be devised for making them happy."

On the 26th August 1796 the King, attended by his uncle and a numerous suite, arrived at the Russian capital, where he was received with all the amiability and gorgeous hospitality which Catherine could so well command. She even told him that she was almost in love with him herself, and she would not suffer him to kiss her hand as she could not forget that he was a King. He is reported to have replied, that if he might not kiss the hand of the Empress, could he not be permitted to salute that of so charming a lady?

The meeting with the Grand-Duchess is described as having been most interesting. Both young people were embarrassed. Alexandra was but fourteen, but already tall and womanly, with a noble and majestic carriage, "softened by all the graces of her sex and age"; her features were regular, her complexion fair, flaxen hair "fell in ringlets on her well-turned neck," and an admiring chronicler who knew her (Masson) records that "innocence, candour, and serenity stamped their divine impressions on her brow." She had been most carefully brought up, and was credited with an excellent understanding coupled with a kindly disposition.

Gustavus was seventeen, tall, well-made, intelligent, and amiable, yet he had dignity and a certain grandeur and stateliness which attracted respect in spite of his youth, of which he had all the graces but none of the awkwardness. His manners were cautious but simple, he had been well educated, and in his conversation he displayed much thoughtfulness, considerable knowledge, and a certain gravity befitting his exalted station. Nor was he dazzled by the splendours of the Russian Court, where he seemed more at ease than the Grand-Dukes themselves.

During his stay the young people had frequent opportunities of meeting, and of talking and dancing together. Catherine,



THE GRAND-DUCHESS ALEXANDRA

who had greatly aged of late, became rejuvenated and seemed to project herself into the life of her granddaughter. She encouraged the young couple so far as to make the boy King kiss the girl Grand-Duchess in her presence.

Everything now seemed the colour of roses, the only question was that of religion, and here the King had gallantly given way and had not insisted on what would have been regarded as an act of apostasy. To Zuboff and Markoff was left the task of drawing up the marriage contract, whilst the Swedish Envoy formally demanded the hand of the Grand-Duchess in marriage for his Sovereign.

The day and hour of the betrothal were actually fixed. The Empress, attended by the Imperial Household, were assembled, but for some reason the bridegroom did not appear. What had happened was this: Markoff had, just before the ceremony, submitted for the King's signature the marriage contract, as drawn up by Zuboff. But the astute, though youthful, monarch was not to be trapped into signing anything of which he did not approve. The contract contained articles providing for a private chapel and the maintenance of Greek Orthodox clergy in the royal palace at Stockholm, and binding the King to enter into certain engagements against the French, which were kept very secret. These came as a complete surprise to the young King, and he therefore refused to sign the contract, nor would the entreaties of his uncle avail; the King remained obdurate.

Catherine had announced that the ceremony would take place at seven, but it was ten before Zuboff had the courage to break the news to her, whispering it in her ear. She rose, attempted to speak, but her tongue failed her. She had a slight fit, the precursor of that from which a few weeks later she did not recover, she withdrew, and the Court was dismissed under pretence of a sudden indisposition of the King. When the truth began to leak out and it was discovered that an attempt had been made to get the marriage contract signed before it had been read and before the terms had been agreed, it was felt that a huge blunder had been perpetrated, for which Zuboff was more particularly blamed.

The unfortunate Grand-Duchess Alexandra seems to have been genuinely broken-hearted, and was taken ill.

The next day but one after this disagreeable incident there was a ball which the young King had the courage to attend, but Catherine did not speak to him and Zuboff was even rude. A week later the King left St. Petersburg, all attempts to patch up the rupture having proved unavailing.

Serious and humiliating as this disappointment had been, the outbreak of the French Revolution, and the series of regrettable events which followed, affected the Empress still more. It seemed to shake her in her theoretical philosophical liberalism, and made her despondent and even reactionary. Her relations with France had indeed never been cordial, but now she offered, with characteristic generosity, the hospitality of her dominions to the unfortunate refugee members of the deposed royal family and their adherents.

CHAPTER XX

AMONG THE PHILOSOPHERS

CATHERINE among the philosophers sounds as incongruous to our ears as the presence of Saul among the prophets appeared to the Israelites, and yet Catherine was truly a philosopher, for she applied her philosophy and lived it, whilst the famous French philosophers chiefly wrote about theirs.

We have seen how in her early years Count Gyllenborg described her as a philosopher of fifteen. During the long period of seclusion while the Empress Elizabeth kept her under jealous observation, she spent the time which hung so heavily on her hands in reading. Plutarch, Cicero, Montesquieu, and a number of French writers, including Mme de Sévigné, were voraciously assimilated by this young Princess at a time of life when her contemporaries were principally preoccupied with frivolities. In 1746 she first came across the works of Voltaire and the famous Dictionary of Bayle, and in 1750, writing to her mother, she calls herself a philosopher, as far as practicably possible, who did not give rein to her passions. The *Encyclopédie* of Diderot first began to appear in 1751 and was eagerly studied by the Russian Grand-Duchess, whose great destiny was still so very problematical.¹

It was not until she ascended the throne that Catherine placed herself in direct communication with the philosophers. The first to be written to, nine days later, was Diderot, on the 6th

¹ The full title is interesting, and runs: "Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, recueilli des meilleurs auteurs et particulièrement des dictionnaires anglais de Chambers, d'Harris, de Dyche, etc. Par une société de gens de lettres. Mis en ordre et publié par M. Diderot et, quant à la partie mathématique, par M. d'Alembert, de l'academie royale des sciences de Paris et de l'académie royale de Berlin."

July 1762, whom she invited at that early date to come to St. Petersburg, there to complete his great work, the publication of which had encountered unexpected difficulties in Paris. Indeed the *Encyclopédie* appealed strongly to the practical sense of the Empress, who was for ever on the look out for means of benefiting her country. Having formed a high opinion of the author from the careful and constant study of his work, she offered him the post of librarian with a substantial salary. Although the offer was not accepted, the bread thus cast on the waters was returned. Voltaire, d'Alembert, and Grimm, the friends of Diderot, trumpeted the praises of the Semiramis of the North all over Europe. Two years later she paid Diderot the salary he had refused, but in a lump sum for fifty years in advance. In this way Catherine tactfully cultivated the public opinion of the contemporary world, and she even descended, in her correspondence to Voltaire, to mendacious falsehoods regarding the condition of her own people—falsehoods for which she should not perhaps be judged too harshly, seeing that she was as yet but imperfectly acquainted with the country she governed, and beheld it through the spectacles of flattering courtiers. Nevertheless, she attained her object, and had all the brightest literary brains of Europe on her side, thus securing for herself and her country what it is customary to-day to call a "good press." Her example has been successfully imitated in Russia ever since.

Her correspondence with Voltaire goes to show that she placed him far above any of his contemporaries and regarded him as ranking with her idol, Montesquieu, who had died in 1755 before she was at liberty to correspond with friends. Nevertheless, when his collected works were published she confessed to Grimm that it was beyond the capacity of any human being to read the whole fifty-two volumes.

This brings us to her *souffre-douleur*, as she nicknamed the correspondent of sovereigns. With nobody did Catherine conduct so voluminous a correspondence as with Frederick Melchior Grimm. This correspondence was commenced in 1774 and was continued practically to her death.

Grimm was of German origin, and born at Regensburg in 1723, and was educated at the University of Leipzig. On the completion of his studies he accompanied Count Schoenberg to

Paris in the capacity of tutor to the latter's children. Here, thanks to the position he held in this distinguished family, he was soon received in the best houses, and became acquainted with d'Alembert, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Diderot, and others. Rousseau, however, did not long remain on good terms with him, and in his *Confessions* gives ample proof of his hatred for his quondam friend. Nevertheless, it was thanks to Rousseau that Grimm was brought in contact with the celebrated Mme d'Épinay, who exercised so considerable an influence over him. It was by joining the controversy on the rival merits of Italian and French music and championing the cause of the latter that Grimm first attracted attention, and his witty pamphlet, entitled *Le petit prophète de Bœhmischbroda*, at once proclaimed him a writer of no mean order. This was in 1753, and it was in this year that he commenced the curious career which he created for himself and which has made him famous. Anticipating the journalistic enterprise of a later century, he constituted himself the literary correspondent of foreign Courts, and supplied them with critical accounts of the latest developments and happenings in French literature.

At that time Paris was to Europe what Boston is to the United States, the hub of the universe. Germany was regarded as a half-civilized country, and Russia had but recently joined the comity of nations and emerged from what was believed to have been a state of semi-Oriental barbarism.

Grimm was therefore in a unique position and utilized his advantages to the full. At first his literary news-service was limited to the Princess of Saxe-Gotha, but later it was subscribed to by a number of other German princes and several European monarchs, among whom was Frederick the Great, who began to take it in in 1760.

Whenever Grimm was absent from Paris, Diderot acted as *locum tenens*. This literary correspondence was continued until 1790, and was first published to the world in 1812, under the title of *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique de Grimm et de Diderot*, in sixteen volumes. But these news-letters which were issued regularly and fortnightly must not be confounded with the intimate and voluminous correspondence which Grimm conducted with the Empress of Russia, the origin

of which can be traced to the former's visit to St. Petersburg in 1773 in the train of the Landgravine Caroline of Hesse-Darmstadt on the occasion of the nuptials of the Grand-Duke Paul with one of the daughters of that very remarkable and energetic woman.

According to Frederick the Great, Grimm was gifted with an extraordinary insight into character, and deployed an admirable tact in his relations with exalted personages. From the very first he succeeded in ingratiating himself with Catherine, and in inspiring her with a perfect confidence and sympathy. He was, according to that monarch's wont whenever she met any person of ability, offered a post in the Russian service, but Grimm excused himself on the plea of advancing years,—he was fifty,—and his ignorance of the Russian language. It will be readily believed that he considered the life and society of Paris more agreeable. For all that, Catherine received him daily and had prolonged conversations with him of an informal and unrestrained character, of which she was so inordinately fond, lasting for hours.

On his departure in the spring of 1774 she proposed to enter into correspondence with him. This interchange of frank and confidential letters between the autocrat of Russia and the lowly scribe was interrupted in 1776 by another visit of Grimm, this time to assist at the second marriage of the Grand-Duke Paul, when he stayed a whole year and made the acquaintance of Gustavus III. of Sweden, by whose invitation he went to that country on his return journey to France. Grimm's personal relations with the foremost Italian artists led to Catherine's commissioning him to act as intermediary in the acquisition of a number of paintings, cameos, and other works of art. Very large sums passed through his hands for this purpose, as well as for the fortunate subjects of the Empress's imperial munificence. Among these was Mme d'Epinay and her family, whom she loaded with favours. As for Grimm himself, who had already been created a Baron of the Roman Empire, he had conferred on him the star of the second class of the order of St. Vladimir, founded by herself, and received an annual honorarium of Rs.2000, besides frequent gifts of money for special services.

During the period of unrest in France, Grimm left Paris and travelled in Germany and the Netherlands, and in 1792 he finally

quitted *la ville lumière*, where he had latterly represented diplomatically the Duchy of Saxe-Gotha, settling first in Frankfort-on-the-Maine, and later in Gotha, where the Empress made him her Minister Plenipotentiary. Shortly before her death, however, she appointed him Resident at Hamburg, a post in which he was confirmed by the Emperor Paul, and remained until a severe illness, which deprived him of one of his eyes, compelled him to retire; he died in 1807, eighty-four years of age.

When Grimm was absent from Paris for any lengthy period his papers were confided to trustworthy care, nevertheless the Empress was exercised in her mind regarding the fate of her letters and dreaded their falling into the hands of the revolutionists. Grimm therefore brought them away to Germany, but even then the Empress was not reassured, and entreated him to burn them. He did not, however, comply with her request, but during the lifetime of Paul directed that they should be delivered to the Grand-Duke Alexander ten years after his own death. It is probable that his wishes were carried out to the letter, for the MSS., according to Professor Grot, who has carefully edited them, and to whom we are indebted for the above particulars of Grimm's career, are preserved in the Imperial Archives, where they are contained in two thick bound volumes. The outspoken though jocular tone of these letters, together with the diversity of their contents, gives them very great historical value. They were at first transmitted by post, which afforded the august correspondent frequent occasion for entertainment at the expense of the curiosity of postal officials; later, however, they were dispatched quarterly by special messengers. In consequence, the letters were spread over a lengthy period and assumed the character of diaries in which Catherine registered her impressions without concealment. It must be confessed that they bear evidence of haste, or rather of carelessness, and are badly written, the French is execrable, and the frequent German interpellations are even worse and generally ungrammatical. Perhaps that is of little moment; they have the great merit of laying bare the soul of a great ruler and a most original and unconventional thinker. A few extracts will help to demonstrate their psychological importance. Here, for instance, is a characteristic passage from a letter dated 21st December 1774 :

"Any one would say that the good friendship and harmony which reigns between my well-beloved brother Abdul and myself was making you thin ; there, that is what you deserve for the pretty epithet you have given me of kill-joy. But I would have you to know, sir, once and for all, that in my life I have never disturbed anybody ; there have always been more people who have wanted to worry me than whom I have wanted to worry. . . . Why should your young monarch, with all the virtues which constitute his motto, be afraid of curs ? His rôle is to pursue his way and to let them bark as he passes. As for me I can get on without the three other *ists*, but I confess I cannot live a day without the *Encyclopédie* ; in spite of all its faults, it is an excellent and necessary piece of work. Miss Cardel and Mr. Wagner [the teachers of her youth] had an awkward pupil who turned everything she was taught the wrong way round. Mr. Wagner wanted experiences of another kind, but the awkward pupil said to herself : in order to be something in this world, it is necessary to have the qualities required for that something ; let us examine our little self seriously, do we possess them ? If not, let us develop them ; is that Lutheran [there is an untranslatable bad pun here—'y a-t-il du *rien* ou *luthurien* à cela'] ? certainly not. Martin Luther was a lout and never learnt that. . . ."

Here is a postscript to a letter of 10th February 1775 :

"On re-reading my letter I find that the word sir (*monsieur*) is not in it : I will put it at the end ; so that you may place it at least once at each page, and this is the designated quantity : sir, sir, sir."

The following shows her concern for education :

"But hearken to me, Messrs. Philosophers, who found no sects, you would be charming and adorable people if you had the charity to draw up a plan of studies for the young, from the A B C to the University, inclusive. You may say that it is inconsiderate of me to ask such a thing ; but I am told that there should be three kinds of schools, and I, who have never studied and who have never been to Paris, I have neither knowledge nor wit, and consequently I do not know what should be learned, nor even what it is possible to learn, and where all this can be pumped up, unless it is from you people. . . ."

Sometimes she could be serious. On the 14th September 1790, she writes :

“ What you say about the unfortunate position of the Queen of France confirms me in what I already knew ; very great prudence is all that one can counsel her now. For the rest, she can count upon it that where I am able to help her I shall make it my duty to do so ; the friend and faithful ally of her brothers, I could not think otherwise : I wish with all my heart that these critical circumstances may change for the better as quickly as possible.”

Whether Catherine's love of the *Encyclopédie* and the Encyclopædists was genuine, as there is every reason to believe, or pretended, as her detractors suggests, when she heard that the further printing and publication of the work had been prohibited her righteous indignation knew no bounds, and she instructed her Ambassador in Paris to invite Diderot in her name to come to St. Petersburg and complete his *magnum opus* there, and put pressure on Voltaire to get him to support her request. Diderot, however, replied that the *Encyclopédie* would be completed, neither in Berlin nor in St. Petersburg, but in Paris, where the printing of it had been resumed, although the imprint bore the name of the town of Neuchâtel and subscribers received their copies surreptitiously.

Diderot had devoted twenty-five of the best years of his life to the work, and when it was completed in 1772 he found himself as badly off as he was in 1746, before he started on it. We do not propose to examine the conduct of Diderot's publisher, Le Breton, suffice it to say that Diderot was in such straits that he resolved to sell his library. A Paris notary was already in treaty with him to buy it when Catherine swooped down and purchased it for Frs.15,000 cash down, but left the books in Diderot's care during his lifetime and appointed him their custodian and her librarian at Frs.1000 per annum. Voltaire says that unless Catherine had stepped in when and as she did, Diderot would most certainly have died of starvation. After Diderot's death the famous library was sent to St. Petersburg, together with a complete collection of his works. It was later placed in the Public Library, but was not kept together.

The splendid action of Catherine awakened a chorus of gratitude from the whole literary world. Writing to d'Alembert and

Voltaire in very similar terms, she said she little expected that the purchase of M. Diderot's library would have evoked so much praise, but she thought it would have been cruel and unjust to separate a philosopher from his books. She added: "I was myself often in fear of having my own books taken from me, and for this reason I made it a rule in former days never to tell what I was reading. My personal experiences prevented me from inflicting on M. Diderot so unpleasant a loss." Diderot's salary was not paid him for two years, intentionally, so his daughter avers, but in order to avoid such forgetfulness in the future he then received the sum of Frs.50,000, being the amount of his salary in advance for fifty years.

Diderot was grateful, and so was the entire republic of letters. One of the ways in which Diderot gave effect to his gratitude was by recommending and sending to her Falconet, the sculptor, who designed the beautiful statue of Peter the Great which Catherine had erected in St. Petersburg. But Diderot was able to render his benefactress a still greater service.

At the time of the Revolution of 1762 there happened to be in St. Petersburg in the capacity of secretary to the French Legation a certain Claude de Rulhière, who on his return to France proceeded to write an *Histoire de la Révolution de Russie*, which was circulated in MS. among friends in the first instance. One of the friends thus consulted was Diderot, who at once perceived how unpleasant the publication of this very outspoken and libellous work would be for the Empress. He immediately informed Catherine of the book and its contents, and she endeavoured to get it suppressed, but her clumsy envoys, who offered a man of the position of de Rulhière money to destroy his work, for all the world as though he were a blackmailer, only made him more intent on his purpose. Diderot now offered his services as negotiator, and after explaining the position to the author got him to promise not to publish his book. De Rulhière kept his word, but he died in 1791, and six years later, in 1797, the posthumous work was published, probably with additions. How far the work is to be credited can be gathered from the following remarks of Catherine, who, by the way, never saw the book:

"It would be difficult," she wrote, "for a secretary of

legation to know in detail and without the aid of his imagination how it all came about. Between ourselves I may tell you that I have daily opportunities of seeing how ready they are to invent lies rather than reveal their ignorance to those who pay them to talk nonsense, to talk about the things they know and the things they do not know. Thus, for instance, I am prepared to wager that the work of M. Rulhière is of no importance, judging more especially by what Diderot says." She then proceeds to explain how the Revolution was a question of the preservation of the nation, who wished for deliverance, and how there was nothing extraordinary about it, nor was it necessary to describe her, as de Rulhière had apparently done, as a masterful woman, or to talk about her "cervello di principessa."

Diderot was less successful with de la Rivière, the author of *De l'Ordre naturel et essentiel des Sociétés Politiques*, whom he recommended to Catherine, and of whom she wrote after his arrival, "the author of essential order talks nonsense," and in the January of 1768 she wrote to Panin to say that de la Rivière was nothing more than a wind-bag, very conceited, and generally speaking resembling a doctor, one of the most contemptuous terms in Catherine's vocabulary.

On the advice of Diderot, Catherine, who knew nothing about art, purchased a number of pictures by Italian and French masters. The famous Thier gallery, containing paintings by Raphael, Vandyck, Rembrandt, Poussin, etc., 500 pictures in all, was bought for Frs.460,000.

Besides being a philosopher, Diderot was also a dramatist, and as a dramatic critic he was regarded by both Voltaire and Lessing as pre-eminent in his time. In this capacity also he was of great service to Catherine, who was devoted to the stage, for which she wrote a great deal herself. He engaged actors for her and generally assisted her in her efforts to raise the tone and standard of the Russian theatre.

It was in 1773 that Diderot paid his first visit to St. Petersburg. Bilbassoff in his monograph on *Diderot in St. Petersburg*, a most remarkable and praiseworthy specimen of Russian historical research, thus dramatically describes the moment of the French philosopher's arrival :

"Never, as yet, had the Empress Catherine II lived through

such a variety of impressions as in the autumn of 1773. Whilst Field-Marshal Count Roumyantzeff had been compelled to retreat with enormous loss from the frontiers of Turkey, where, before Silistria, he had not only nearly destroyed the Russian army but also his fame as a conqueror, there already appeared near Yaïka the imperial insignia of Gregory Pougatcheff; whilst in the very palace itself there was being waged the most embittered struggle between two hostile factions, that of Orloff and that of Panin, and even in the interior apartments the Empress beheld at times a sullen look on the face of Vassiltchikoff—St. Petersburg was preparing every kind of festivity for the occasion of the nuptials of the Grand-Duke Paul. At that moment, in the September of 1773, there arrived in St. Petersburg, Diderot ! ”

Catherine had invited him as early as 1767, stating as her reasons : “ I would wish to see him here, not only because I wish to protect him from persecution in the future, to which I fear he will be exposed, but also because it is pleasant to meet people of worth. I am unable to decide what appointment to give him ; in the first place, because I would not wish to embarrass him in his choice, and secondly, because I want to make his personal acquaintance before offering him anything ; in any case, it is certain that if he were to come here, and if I give effect to my inclination, I would keep him about me for my instruction.” But it was not until the *Encyclopédie* had been completed, six years later, that he could make up his mind to undertake the journey. He travelled so slowly, and was moreover laid up on the way, that his arrival was despaired of. Narishkin, who was his travelling companion, and looked after his comforts, offered to put him up, but Diderot considered that his friend Falconet would be offended if he did not stay with him, and drove to the latter’s house only to discover that his visit was most unwelcome and inconvenient, and that there was no spare bed for him. Deeply mortified, he was now compelled to beg for the hospitality he had previously declined.

The journey to St. Petersburg has been ascribed by his detractors to ulterior motives, but the philosopher’s admirers are equally emphatic in maintaining that Diderot merely wished to testify his gratitude, which in his case could never have been



D. DIDEROT.

"a lively expectation of favours to come," but was absolutely and entirely disinterested.

Whatever Diderot may have thought of St. Petersburg he did not commit his impressions to paper. Alfieri, who had visited that capital three years before, was horrified with it, and describes it as "an Asiatic camp composed of serried rows of extended hovels," inhabited by "barbarians masquerading as Europeans"; whilst the Papal Nuncio went into ecstasies over this, "one of the most beautiful, flourishing, and important towns of Europe." Perhaps the silence of Diderot was more discreet than the abuse of the poet or the rhapsodies of the cleric. On the day after his arrival Diderot was awakened by the sound of church bells and the booming of guns. From the windows of the house of Narishkin he could see the bridal procession to the cathedral, the gilt coach of the Empress, and the splendours and glories of the Russian guards, but, like a true philosopher, he paid no attention to these trappings. He had no smart clothes, and arrived at Court in the sombre black suit which he was in the habit of wearing on ordinary occasions. His daughter records that the Empress presented him with a handsome Court costume.

General Bauer, writing to Count Nesselrode at Potsdam, says :

"Diderot is here, and everybody pays him the greatest attention. It is a pity, however, that there are so few people able to appreciate him for other reasons than that he is the fashion."

Catherine was delighted with him, and spent hours in his society in absolute privacy. Diderot was equally enchanted with her, and described her as combining the mind of Brutus with the charms of Cleopatra, and stated that his conversations with her were as free and unrestrained as though conducted with any ordinary private individual. Indeed his gesticulations, his seizure of her hand in moments of excitement in order to emphasize what he was saying, and his unconventional bearing in general, seem to have considerably amused Grimm.

In a letter to Mme Geoffrin, Catherine says :

"Your Diderot is quite an extraordinary man; after every conversation with him all my ribs are crushed and black. I was at last obliged to put a table between him and myself, as a protection from his gesticulations." But what she appreciated

in his conversation was his frankness and his ability to tell the truth with a smile. He himself wrote that falsehood never entered the study of the Empress when a philosopher was there. Of all the questions which Catherine discussed with Diderot, that of national education seems to have interested them both the most; while he drew up schemes for universities and primary and secondary schools, he appears to have been delighted with the educational establishments he saw, and more especially with the Smolny Institute for young ladies, which had been founded by Catherine in imitation of Mme de Maintenon's famous *Maison Royale de Saint-Cyr*, and which has had such an elevating and refining influence on Russian society even down to the present day.

When Diderot left St. Petersburg, the Empress and he, despite envious rumours to the contrary, parted on the best of terms. The philosopher was loaded with benefits, and Catherine's generous admiration for the fearless rationalist who, though by no means orthodox, was far from being a disbeliever, continued unaltered to the end.

Of all the philosophers she really abhorred and detested only one, and that was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It was his theory of equality which more especially excited her aversion; in it she seemed to behold the germs of that French Revolution which embittered her last years. After Rousseau's death she refers to him as "of doubtful memory."

If Catherine was a benefactress of foreign philosophers, she was no less a patroness of native talent. On her accession the central figure in Russian literature was the veteran poet and scientist Lomonossoff, whose father had been a humble peasant and whose life had been a long and laborious, but successful, struggle against poverty and adverse circumstances. He was at the time, in 1762, in the enjoyment of a position of great consideration at the head of the Academy. On the death of Elizabeth he was engaged on a project for a university. He was at once a poet, Russia's first grammarian, a man of science, and the founder of industries, especially the manufacture of glass. He had, however, owed his latest successes more particularly to the enemies of Catherine, the Shouvaloffs and Vorontzoffs. He had written an ode as in duty bound in praise of Peter III, but on the

death of that monarch he prudently trimmed his pen to celebrate his successor, in his anxiety to "save his bacon," as the phrase is. Catherine treated his effusion with contempt. Polevoy, in his history of Russian literature, sententiously remarks that Catherine did not take vengeance on her adversaries and their abettors, but turned away from them with dignity and could forget them. This was the fate which befell Lomonossoff. Unfortunately his colleagues at the Academy, jealous of his eminent position, now commenced to intrigue against him; regrettable quarrels arose and incidents occurred, until at last Catherine, with a view to the maintenance of the dignity of the Academy, decided to dismiss the poet. She promoted him to the rank of Councillor of State, however, and awarded him a pension of half his salary. Lomonossoff without demur at once departed for the country, and his enemies were jubilant, one of them even writing to a friend abroad that the Academy had at last been freed of Lomonossoff.

In the meantime Catherine suddenly changed her mind; what moved her to do so is not on record, but it is at least certain that Lomonossoff took no steps to influence her. Whatever her reason may have been, she rescinded her previous decree and reinstated the veteran in his old post, to which he now returned with renewed courage and vigour to triumph over his enemies. He did not long enjoy the imperial favour, but died two years later, just as he was planning the equipment of an Arctic expedition. About a year before his death Catherine paid him a visit, attended by some of the notables of the Court, in order to inspect some mosaic work for a memorial to Peter the Great, as well as some scientific instruments invented by the poet, and to witness some physical and chemical experiments.

A writer of a different character was Alexander Sumarokoff, who came of an old and distinguished noble Muscovite family. He was born in 1717, but little is known of his early years. At the age of fifteen he entered the corps of cadets founded by Field-Marshal Münnich, which was at that time practically the only public school in Russia in which a general education could be procured. In 1740, while still at school, Sumarokoff dedicated to the Empress Anne a congratulatory ode, on behalf of this establishment. He was now twenty-two, and entered the

service. Of his military career very little is known. In 1747 appeared his first tragedy, *Khoreff*, which was followed in 1748 by *Hamlet*; these were the first Russian tragedies. The first Russian theatrical company was formed in the provincial town of Yaroslav by Volkoff at about this time, and here the plays of Sumarokoff were performed.

Although foreign theatrical companies were frequently invited to St. Petersburg by the Empress Anne, it was not until 1752 that Volkoff's company gave a performance in the Imperial palace. In 1755 or 1756 the first Imperial Russian Theatre was founded by Imperial decree in St. Petersburg, and Brigadier Sumarokoff was given the management. Thus this young soldier may be described as the father of the Russian stage. His post was not a bed of roses, however, and his task was a thankless one. The cultured exquisites sneered at the rude attempts of the Russian muse, and reserved their admiration for foreign actors and actresses and for foreign plays. In a satirical journal entitled *The Industrious Bee*, founded by Sumarokoff, he complained of his difficulties and put forward his claims to recognition. One of his greatest pests appears to have been that natural enemy of all playwrights, the censor. In those days the way of the literary man was as hard as that of the transgressor, and although Sumarokoff was speedily recognized as the rival if not the equal of Lomonossoff, he seems to have prospered but little. On the accession of Catherine she showered favours and money upon him in a vain endeavour to relieve him from his interminable financial embarrassments, and displayed an inexhaustible patience and never-failing condescension in listening to his constant complaints and in bearing with his bad temper and failings, for, although he was about fifty years of age, married, and with a large family, he lived a life of wild dissipation and was grossly intemperate in his habits.

Sumarokoff settled in Moscow in 1769, still protected by Imperial favour, and died there in 1777, virtually through drink and poverty, for though he was always receiving gifts he was always in want.

During the reign of Catherine, besides these two leading authors, Lomonossoff and Sumarokoff, a number of minor writers came to the front, and at least three stars of the first

magnitude appeared on the firmament, namely, the poet Dyerjavin, the historian, Karamsin, and the witty and satirical Von Wiesen, whose comedies are still read with pleasure and counted among the Russian classics. Among the minor stars were such names as Novikoff, Kapnist, Chemnitzer, Bogdanovitch, etc. This undoubted burst of literary efflorescence is attributed, by Russian writers, largely, if not entirely, to the benevolent attitude of Catherine the Great. Polevoy, who cannot be described as a sycophant, in a few eloquent sentences thus characterizes her influence: "Endowed with a quick-thinking, profound, and observant mind, possessing besides a very wide and, for her time, remarkable, fully European, education, sympathizing sincerely with the humane and philosophical tendencies of her day, Catherine afforded Russia during the greater part of the thirty-four years of her reign one of the best periods in the historical life of the eighteenth century. Striving to give Russia all the benefits of Western culture and to introduce into Russian life the best principles of European private and political society, Catherine was bound to recognize the uses of literature in the achievement of her object. For this reason, not content with promoting the growth of literature and journalism with us, she herself, with considerable literary ability, and a keen appreciation of what was going on around her, proceeded to show others the way, she entered with enthusiasm into polemical journalism, and produced brilliant pictures of contemporary manners in a series of comedies and satirical sketches."

Polevoy for these reasons places Catherine at the head of the new period of Russian literature, of which her reign was the harbinger, and which she by deed and precept did so much to promote.

CHAPTER XXI

MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER

AS we have seen in the early part of this work (Chapter VII), the maternal instincts of Catherine were nipped in the bud, so to say, by the Empress Elizabeth, who carried off the infant Paul and undertook his bringing up herself, exhibiting in so doing an injudicious affection which nearly proved the child's ruin. The appointment of Panin as tutor and instructor of the future heir to the throne was likewise the work of Elizabeth; nor did Catherine approve the course of instruction any more than the choice of instructor. Later, when she had power to do so, Catherine, who had never been permitted to see her son oftener than once a week, continued, for political reasons, to maintain in his office the tutor in whom she had so little trust. As she said many years later (in 1793), the people would at that time have feared for the safety of Paul had she removed him from Panin's care, and the mere statement of such considerations throws a flood of light on the relations existing between mother and son.

His teachers have borne testimony to the infelicitous conditions of his early training. Paroshin shows us how the Grand-Duke, always in the company of grown-up persons who never exercised any restraint over their conversation when in his presence, heard of many things concerning which a child should preferably remain ignorant. Paul developed at an early age a certain eccentricity of ideas and an inconstancy, not to say volatility, in his affections. Paroshin once assured him that, with the best intentions in the world, he would yet be universally detested. Another of his preceptors, the Priest Platon, relates that the Grand-Duke developed early a strong bent for the study of the military sciences, but frequently passed from one

subject to another, exhibiting but little patience or application in the pursuit of any particular branch of study, and being more attracted by the external appearance of any object that attracted his gaze than disposed to enter into a more profound and detailed knowledge of it. The Empress was reproached with taking too little interest in his education, and Princess Dashkoff says that Paul, when adolescent, produced the impression of a boy whose mind had been but slowly developed, and whose education had been a failure. Baron Dimsdale, on the other hand, who found nothing to criticize in Russia, was profuse in his admiration.

We have seen that the Grand-Duke Paul was at one time regarded as the rightful Emperor, and thus constituted a sort of innocent and unconscious pretender to the throne. If Catherine had actually married Gregory Orloff, as so many thought she would, there can be little doubt but that the position of Paul would have become still less enviable and even critical. The rupture between Catherine and Gregory Orloff, however, brought about an improvement in the relations of mother and son. Many short notes from the Empress to Panin exhibit her solicitude in regard to her son's education, and show how carefully she watched over the same.

In a private letter describing her life at Tzarskoye Selo in the summer of 1772, the Empress says: "Never have we enjoyed ourselves so much at Tzarskoye Selo as during the last nine weeks which were spent with my son, who is growing into a fine boy." And in another letter she says: "On Tuesday I am again returning to town with my son, who will not leave me out of his sight, and whom I have the honour of so greatly amusing that he petitions to be seated next to me at table; I think it would be difficult to find examples of such complete agreement of disposition."

In a note addressed by her to Paul in 1773 she says: "I will appoint an hour or two in the week when you shall come to me alone to listen to the transaction of business. In this manner you will become acquainted with the course of affairs and familiarize yourself with the laws of the country and my principles of government."

Throughout the following year and after his marriage the

relations between mother and son were excellent ; the Empress redoubled her attentions to the Grand-Duke and especially distinguished Panin. At first she seems also to have been greatly pleased with her daughter-in-law, but later we find her writing to Grimm about this Princess in somewhat less laudatory terms. She is said to be always ill, nor should this be surprising, seeing that she is unable to practise moderation in anything, not even in dancing. She will listen to neither good nor bad advice ; she has been eighteen months in Russia, but has taken no pains to learn the language, of which she does not know a word ; she is heavily in debt, in spite of a very handsome allowance, and so on. But Catherine does not abandon hope—"one must never despair of young people," she says, "nor must they be scolded too long." The condition of the Princess seemed to grow from bad to worse in the February of 1775, but in the August of the same year she appears to have been sufficiently restored to health to attend a performance of *Mme Favart* in the woods of Tzaritsino on the occasion of her saint's day, and Catherine writes to Grimm : "You prayed that my pilgrimage to Troitza might work a miracle, and that Heaven might do for a young princess what it did in the past for Sarah and old Elizabeth ; your prayers have been heard." Catherine then goes on to say that the Princess's health is much improved. Alas ! the high hopes thus given rise to were not destined to be fulfilled, and the pathetic letter in which Catherine records the death in childbed of her refractory daughter-in-law is all the more creditable to her heart in view of the obvious haste and the impromptu tone of her letter. From among numerous passages the following will illustrate the unaffected sincerity of the Empress : "You could not imagine what she must have suffered, and we with her ; my soul is torn to pieces. I have not had a moment's rest during all the five days, and I did not leave this Princess, day or night, until I closed her eyes. She told me : 'You are an excellent nurse.' Imagine my position : I had to console one, reassure the other, worn out body and soul, and being obliged to decide and think of everything that should not be forgotten. I confess to you that I have never in my life found myself in a more difficult, more horrible, more trying position. I forgot to drink, eat, or sleep, and I do not know

how my strength was kept up. I begin to think that if this experience does not upset my nervous system it is inupsettable. Twenty-four hours before the death of the Grand-Duchess I sent word to Prince Henry (of Prussia) begging him to look after the Grand-Duke, for the sake of my peace of mind. He arrived and never left him." The Grand-Duke is described as bearing his profound sorrow with firmness, but that he was finally seized with a fever.

On his recovery he was sent to Berlin, whilst Catherine proceeded to search for a second wife for him, in which search, of course, Grimm's advice and services were in request. The choice fell on the Princess Sophia of Würtemberg, whom it was arranged that Paul should meet during his stay in Berlin, mother and son exchanging a lively correspondence. Paul here made the acquaintance of Frederick the Great, and conceived for that monarch a very warm attachment, which led to his leaning towards Prussia, when Catherine's policy had been to draw closer to Austria. Thus the political opinions of the two began to diverge at this early stage. Paul returned to Russia in August, and Catherine tells Grimm that the Princess is not expected for another ten days. "As soon as we have got her," she writes, "we shall proceed with her conversion. In order to convince her I think we shall want quite a fortnight. I do not know how long it may take her to learn to read in Russian, and intelligibly and correctly, her confession of faith, but the sooner that can be fixed up the better. In order to hurry things up, M. Pastoukhoff has gone to Memel to teach her the alphabet and creed on the journey; conviction will come later."

With business-like promptness this programme was carried out and the wedding duly celebrated. The young couple seemed to have been much attached to each other, and Catherine was pleased, although, as she said, that was not everything, and there were many other things to be desired besides.

If she meant children, she had no cause to complain, but from her own personal point of view she had small ground for satisfaction. The attitude adopted by Paul towards all the problems of government was diametrically opposite to that of his mother, and so she kept him more and more away from

the affairs of State. Nor did foreign diplomatists either appear to have had much opinion of the ability of Paul, and thus the political isolation of the Grand-Duke led to an antagonism between the Empress and the "young Court," which the years only tended to increase.

In the year 1780 the newly married couple made the tour of Europe and seem to have produced an excellent impression everywhere. We get glimpses of them in numerous contemporary memoirs, and in Paris the Grand-Duchess ordered some dresses from that famous and imperious Mlle Rose Bertin, whose life by Émile Langlade has been recently put into an English dress by Dr. A. S. Rappoport and published in London. During this journey the Grand-Duke surprised the diplomatists and royalties he met by his complete ignorance of the latest political acts of his mother. It was from the Emperor of Austria in Vienna, for instance, that he first heard of the conclusion of an Austro-Russian alliance. In this capital the leading tragedian refused to perform Shakespeare's famous tragedy before the Russian Hamlet, as he called him. In Florence, Paul discussed his mother's political opinions with the Arch-Duke Leopold, and stated that Potemkin and other leading Russian statesmen had been purchased by Viennese gold; adding that as soon as he came to power he would have them flogged out of his service.

The Grand-Duke Paul and his consort lived preferably at Pavlovsk and at Gatchina—where the former, in imitation of his father, created a "young guard," who were put into uncomfortable Prussian uniforms, drilled from morning to night, and treated with a severity and punished with a cruelty reminiscent of Peter III, and only explicable on the assumption that the heir to the throne had inherited from his father his strain of madness as well as his personal appearance.

All writers agree that Catherine made up her mind soon after the birth of her eldest grandchild, Alexander, to make him her heir and to exclude his father from the succession. From this meritorious step she was prevented by the suddenness of her death. General Schilder, in his monumental life of Alexander I, makes the following extremely interesting observation :

“ Catherine was in no sense the cruel and heartless mother, as so many writers are inclined to represent her, but she knew her son well, foresaw the disastrous effects of his reign, and could not contemplate without anxiety the prospect that the empire which she had so rapidly brought along the road of prosperity, glory, and culture, would, after her death, be left without any guarantee of stability. With the intention of saving her country from such a misfortune Catherine desired to transmit the throne to the Grand-Duke Alexander, for which reason the exclusion of the heir apparent from the succession appeared in her eyes to be a political necessity. Moreover, it is sufficiently well known that Catherine had long been accustomed to subordinate everything to the interests of the State, and to sacrifice to them all other considerations and feelings. . . .”

Brückner, without crediting any of them, has retailed all the various stories current after her death, the most interesting of which is the statement of Prince Serge Galitzin, to the following effect :

“ After the death of the Empress Catherine II her study was sealed up for several days. The Emperor Paul sent for the Grand-Duke Alexander, Prince Alexander Kourakine, and (I think) Rostoptchin, and ordered them to open the study and examine the papers. The Grand-Duke Alexander, with Kourakine and Rostoptchin, all three entered the study ; there they found, among other matters, the papers concerning the case of Peter III, tied up with a black ribbon, and the will and testament of Catherine, in which she spoke of the absolute exclusion from the throne of the Grand-Duke Paul, the accession of Alexander, and the appointment of his mother, the Grand-Duchess Marie, as regent during his minority. The Grand-Duke Alexander, after reading this document, turned to Kourakine and Rostoptchin and made them promise on oath to say nothing about it ; he then threw the will and testament into the burning stove. On their return Paul asked them what they had found ; and they told him. He then inquired : ‘ Is there nothing about me ? ’ To which the Grand-Duke Alexander replied that there was nothing. Thereupon Paul made the sign of the cross and exclaimed : ‘ Well, thank God ! ’ ”

Whilst throwing doubt on the details of this and a number of

almost identical stories which he quotes *in extenso* from Sabloukoff, Engelhardt, and Gribovski, together with a series of traditional anecdotes, all more or less to the same effect, Brückner thinks it is nevertheless probable that the main features of these stories are true, and that there was a will, excluding Paul from the throne and designating Alexander in his place, which subsequently disappeared in a more or less mysterious manner.

If Catherine did indeed intend to exclude Paul from the throne, his subsequent conduct as emperor fully justified the wisdom of such a design. He seems to have possessed all the vices of his father, without any of his redeeming features. If Peter III was a self-willed, impetuous, half-witted but not altogether unamiable fool, Paul was a stubborn, cruel, morose, and inconstant monomaniac who was a positive danger to the State so long as he continued to remain alive. Even the generous attempt of M. Waliszewski to rehabilitate his character must be admitted to have handsomely failed in spite of the best intentions.

Whether Paul would have developed a more cheerful character under sunnier home influences is hardly worth considering. To speculate on what might have been had circumstances been otherwise is generally admitted to be futile; besides, we have seen that, whatever else may be said against her, Catherine can scarcely be accused of possessing a gloomy, morose, or melancholy disposition. She seems to have been, on the contrary, the very personification of brightness and vivacity. Though her unresponsive son seems to have choked her maternal instincts, they appear to have been drawn out, to burst forth with renewed life and vigour, by her grandchildren.

The eldest of these, Alexander, was born on the 12th/23rd December 1777, just after St. Petersburg had recovered from the stormy days of the previous September, when the capital of Russia was visited by floods which threatened to submerge it. The Empress herself chose his name for him. Writing to Grimm two days later she asked him: "Do you know Monsieur Alexandre?—But I am prepared to wager that you do not know Monsieur Alexandre at all, at least not the one I am about to talk of. It is not of Alexander the Great, by any means, but of

quite a little Alexander who was born on the 12th of this month at a quarter to eleven in the morning. All this means that the Grand-Duchess has been delivered of a boy who, in honour of St. Alexander Nevski, has received the magniloquent name of Alexander, and whom I call Monsieur Alexandre. . . . But what will become of the boy ? I console myself with Bayle and the father of Tristram Shandy, who attached some importance to names, and this one is indeed illustrious. . . . It is a pity that fairies have gone out of fashion ; they would have endowed you an infant with whatever one desired. As for me, I would have given them beautiful presents and whispered in their ears, 'Ladies, give him a good disposition, just a spice of good nature, and experience will pretty well do the rest.'"

On the 22nd of December she writes : " Monsieur Alexandre was baptized the day before yesterday, and everybody is well except the English, who have dropped their heads to their stomachs ever since the deplorable adventure of General Burgoyne." This is an allusion to the surrender of the British forces at Saratoga. The christening, so briefly dismissed in a couple of words, was a most gorgeous ceremony. Joseph II of Austria and Frederick II of Prussia were the child's sponsors, thus foreshadowing, as Schilder remarks, the Holy Alliance of the next century. The christening was followed by a round of festivities, of which Catherine pathetically and comically complains to her *souffre-douleur*.

Having her own ideas on education, and having experienced a similar separation herself, she had no scruples in taking the infant away from its mother and superintending the upbringing of the future ruler of All the Russias. According to her own account, she had made up her mind to have him brought up as simply as possible. For the present his body was the chief preoccupation : it was left free, without swaddling clothes and all but naked, and intelligently hardened. The child was allowed to do as it liked, but if it maltreated its doll, the latter was promptly taken away from him. The child was always merry and very obedient. We get glimpses of his progress in her letters to Grimm. Catherine seems to have been in ecstasies over his wonderful cleverness. Every day the child spent hours in his grandmother's room ; she played with him, designed toys for him, and later wrote

children's books for him. Naturally the child was devoted to her. She herself gave him his first lessons, teaching him arithmetic when he was but four years old. Catherine appears to have been a great votary of the bath, and as soon as the boy was old enough he was made to love his cold tub. Needless to add that his first nurse was an Englishwoman.

Alexander's brother, Constantine, was born in 1779. More delicate than Alexander, he was supposed to be like his grandmother, but as he grew older he resembled his father more than any of Paul's children. His arrival was particularly welcome, for Catherine was most anxious that Alexander should have a brother. "I am quite indifferent," she wrote, "as to whether Alexander has sisters or not, but he must have a younger brother." He was born at the time when Catherine was full of her Greek projects, for which reason he was given a name reminiscent of the Byzantine Empire. As an indication of what was in her mind she caused a medal to be struck in commemoration of his birth, the face of which bore the portrait of the Empress with a small crown and a wreath of laurel, whilst the reverse showed between the figures of Faith and Hope that of Charity bearing a child in her arms, with a view of Constantinople and the Church of St. Sophia on the right, the sea on the left, and a rising star.

Ten years later Catherine told her secretary, Khrapovitski: "Let the Turks go where they wish, the Greeks can be regenerated. Constantine is a fine boy; ten years hence he will sail from Sebastopol to Constantinople." She considered that Turkey might be partitioned, portions being given to England, France, and Spain, and that the "remnants" would suffice for Constantine, who was but a younger son.

Constantine, who was taken under his grandmother's wing, like his brother, was at first a weakly child, sullen and unfriendly, shy and disposed to hide his head from the light, characteristics which he retained through life. The two boys were brought up together, and Catherine watched over and commented on their development, the early manifestations of traits of character, their carpentry and drawing, the obedience and intelligence of the eldest, the insubordination and obstinacy of the younger, with an attentiveness, a minuteness, and an interest which at

once bear testimony to her affection for and sympathy with children.

In a copy of Fénelon's famous *Telemachus*, containing a memorandum in her own handwriting, some of the ideas which Catherine desired to implant into the minds of her grandchildren are jotted down :

" Study people, endeavour to profit by them, without confiding in them indiscriminately. Search the world for true merit ; in the majority of cases it is modest and hides itself away ; virtue does not proclaim itself in a crowd, it is distinguished neither by greed nor ostentation, it is passed over and ignored. Never surround yourselves with flatterers ; let it be felt that you hate people to praise you whilst abasing themselves. Bestow your confidence only on those who have the courage to contradict you if need be, and who prefer your good name to your benefactions. Be gentle, benevolent, accessible, compassionate, and liberal-minded. Your exalted position should never be an obstacle to your kindly condescension to the lowly nor to your placing yourself in their position in such a manner that your benevolence should neither detract from your power nor their respect. Give ear to anything which may in any way be deserving of your attention. Let people see that you think and feel as it becomes you to do. Behave in such a manner that good people may love you, bad people fear you, and everybody respect you. Preserve in your heart those grand qualities which constitute the distinguishing characteristics of all honest men, great men, and heroes. Hold all low artifices in aversion ; may your contact with the world never obscure your classic love of honour and virtue. May reprehensible principles and wicked cunning never find a way into your heart. Duplicity is foreign to the great, who despise meanness of every kind."

In her choice of La Harpe for their tutor, an uncompromising Swiss who was at heart a Republican if not a Jacobin, she certainly adhered to the precepts cited above. The honest Swiss was no respecter of persons and was very frank in his criticism of his pupils. Their mathematical master was Masson, and, generally speaking, Catherine was indefatigable in her efforts to provide them with good instructors and to cater both for their minds and their bodies. Alexander later fully justified the

pains and care that were taken with his education, although Constantine continued to the end one of those incalculable characters, composed of so many contradictions, that historians are still undecided as to whether they should lay more stress on his undoubted generous impulses, or on the furious paroxysms of rage to which he was so regrettably prone. In this respect the two brothers differed but in degree. The elder was in every respect a much milder, perhaps more colourless character than the younger, but in both two conflicting forces seemed to be at work—the one kindly, amiable, and just, the other tyrannical, whimsical, and petulant; the one evidently inherited from the thoughtful, dispassionate, and intellectual grandmother, the other from the half-witted, self-indulgent, impulsive grandfather. As soon as the boys were old enough Catherine, perhaps somewhat prematurely, provided them with wives, and gave them separate establishments, whereupon their parents, with rather unfortunate results for the dispositions of their children, tried to regain their natural rights over them.

The person perhaps most to be pitied in these circumstances and in those intrigues and jealousies between the Court and “the young Court” was undoubtedly the mother of the infant Grand-Dukes, a woman of whom historians have had nothing but good to say, who seems to have been a person of great piety and who had not a very enviable life before her son came to the throne. Her husband appears to have been harsh and faithless, and her mother-in-law, to judge by the very few and casual references which occur in her letters, seems to have frankly despised her. She does not play an important part in the life of the Court, nor could her intellectual equipment be described as more than modest. Her duties were confined to being the mother of her children, whom she was not even permitted to rear. Both she and her husband were treated as absolute nullities by the Empress, and so regarded by her entourage. Catherine was much too good natured to persecute the wife of her son, but it is pretty clear that she found her rather inconvenient on more than one occasion, and brushed her aside with as little consideration as one brushes aside a fly which is in the way. In the education of the children, for instance, Catherine, while never giving way to anger or resorting to fierce punishments, did not spoil her grand-

children, whilst their mother did. We come across references in the letters to Grimm to the running wild of the children during Catherine's absence. Evidently she regarded their parents' influence as harmful, and indeed, when we consider the change which came over Alexander after his military training under his father's eye, we are bound to concede that Paul, at any rate, had a degenerating effect on his son's character. Nicholas I was brought up in accordance with his mother's views, and owed the unamiable traits in his character largely to the brutal floggings inflicted by his tutor, Count Lamsdorff.

CHAPTER XXII

THE END

THE visit of King Gustavus IV of Sweden to St. Petersburg, described in a previous chapter, the entertainments this visit involved, and the profound disappointment with which it was brought to a close are believed to have hastened the death of Catherine. For six weeks the Court had been given up to a round of pleasure, and the Empress had subjected herself to constant fatigue. The toil of going up and down stairs, the business of dressing, and the effort of appearing in public, had for some time been felt as a wearisome strain, which was not made more bearable by her desire to appear young and full of health and vigour, and her dislike to being carried in a sedan-chair. Several nobles, when giving entertainments which were graced by her presence, altered the stairs in their houses so as to afford her an easier ascent.

Towards the close of her life, Masson assures us, she had so increased in size as to be an object almost of deformity, and although there seems to be some exaggeration in this statement, it is nevertheless true that in spite of her great abstemiousness and moderation in food, she undoubtedly developed in later years a tendency to portliness, especially below the waist. Her legs had become swollen and ulcerated, largely in consequence of the sedentary life she led and the hours she spent at the desk. Accustomed in her youth to exercise and the open air, the enforced confinement entailed by her conscientious and laborious attention to the affairs of State had undoubtedly undermined her constitution. Masson says, somewhat sarcastically, that she could no longer boast the handsome foot which had formerly been so much admired. But we must bear in mind that at the time about which he was writing she was seventy-one, an age at which

few ladies, even to-day, when senility has been banished from society and everybody is juvenile, retain all the elegance and sprightliness of their youth. Had she but gracefully yielded to the inroads of time, her venerable appearance would assuredly have excited respect instead of ridicule, but unfortunately, although a philosopher, she was a woman, and, like our own Queen Elizabeth, her indomitable spirit refused to surrender; but the artifices she resorted to in order to conceal the stubborn and rebellious truth did not contribute to her dignity. While she resisted old age, she despised the doctor's aid, but was not always proof against the dangerous insidiousness of quacks.

Masson relates how one evening, when she was visiting the house of a Russian noble in the company of the King of Sweden, "a bright star shot from the sky over her head, and fell into the Neva; and for the honour of truth and funereal tokens, I must add that this fact was the common talk of the whole city. Some would have it that this star was a prognostic of the young (future) Queen's journey into Sweden; while others, remarking that it made its descent near the spot where the citadel and tombs of the sovereigns were situated, tremblingly whispered that it was the harbinger of the approaching dissolution of the Empress."

Brückner and other Russian historians describe this incident differently, and the divergence throws a significant light on the credibility of the ungrateful Masson. According to them it was the Empress who exclaimed, on seeing the falling star, "That is a messenger to announce my approaching death!" The courtier to whom this observation was made immediately replied: "Your Majesty has ever been free from superstition and prejudice, why believe in omens now?" But Catherine only answered: "I feel my strength failing, and know that I am sinking." There were moments, however, when she still felt like her old self. Writing to Grimm on the 18th August 1796, she says: "Farewell, and good health. As for me, I am happy and feel as light as a bird!"

The behaviour of the King of Sweden in so unexpectedly and abruptly refusing the hand of her granddaughter had, as we have seen, so seriously affected the Empress, as to have brought about a slight stroke of apoplexy. For several days afterwards she imposed a great constraint upon herself in order that

she might appear with her accustomed serenity and betray no sign of her vexation. In consequence, Masson tells us, "the blood and humours crowded still more to the head; her face, which was before highly inflamed, became at this period additionally red and livid, and her indisposition returned with greater frequency."

One evening, in the beginning of November 1796, the 4th, according to some accounts, the 5th, according to others, Catherine was holding her "little hermitage," or informal gathering of intimates, and was particularly gay and lively. She had just received news of the retreat of the French, under Moreau, across the Rhine, and she had written a line to Cobenzel, the Austrian Minister, to the following effect :

"I hasten to inform your excellent Excellency that the excellent troops of the excellent Court have given the French an excellent beating."

Delighted with her witticism, she was as pleased as a child, indeed her fondness of a bad joke was her besetting sin. She was enjoying herself with Leo Narishkin, her grand equerry and buffoon-in-chief, with whom she was bargaining for bawbles which he carried like a pedlar. Narishkin disliked to hear of anybody's death, and so Catherine, in order to tease him, related the news she had just heard of the death of the King of Sardinia, and spoke of the event in the jocular manner and, we should add, with the bad taste, to which she was so unfortunately addicted. She retired, however, at an unusually early hour, pleading that too much laughing had made her ill.

The next morning she got up at her ordinary time, and sending for her favourite, gave him a short audience. She then transacted business with her secretaries, but dismissed the last who came, telling him to wait outside in the antechamber until she sent for him. As a considerable period elapsed, uneasiness was felt, and her servants made a search for her, finding her stretched on the floor between two doors leading from her alcove. She was already insensible. Zuboff, whose apartments were just over hers, was immediately sent for, and a doctor was also fetched. A mattress was placed near the window, and on this she was laid. She was bled, bathed, and treated with the usual barbarity of contemporary medical science, but all to no purpose. She was

alive, for her heart was still beating, there was therefore room for hope. The principal functionaries of the Court were sent for, and Zuboff dispatched his brother to the Grand-Duke Paul. Meanwhile the Imperial family, and the rest of the household, knew nothing. Until eleven o'clock, when she usually sent for the Grand-Dukes, it was not known that she was ill, and the seriousness of her condition did not transpire till one.

When Paul arrived with his whole family, Catherine gave no sign of recognition. Her grandchildren burst into tears, while their father, whose grief was less poignant, as may be easily imagined, was occupied in giving directions and making preparations for his accession. Catherine still breathed. The palace was surrounded and orders were given that nobody be allowed to leave the capital, nor were couriers permitted to be dispatched. It was generally believed that Catherine had died the previous evening, but that for reasons of State the fact had been concealed. She was, however, still in a kind of lethargy. The remedies which had been administered had produced their natural effect, and she had even moved one of her feet and pressed the hand of one of her women ; but happily for Paul, so Masson tells us, the power of speech was gone for ever. At about ten in the evening she seemed to revive, then the rattling in the throat set in. The Imperial family hastened to her side, but the young Grand-Duchesses could not bear the spectacle and had to be taken away. Catherine now gave a penetrating shriek, which was heard in the neighbouring apartments, and gave up the ghost. She had been insensible for thirty-seven hours, and gave no sign of pain all that time, until the moment before her death, which appears to have been as happy as her reign.

Masson adds that Catherine's servants sincerely bewailed a good mistress whose mild and equal temper, and noble and dignified character, were above those daily bickerings, those gusts of petty passion, which are the poison of domestic life.

Here follows a description of the Empress as he knew her :

" Though seventy years of age, Catherine still retained some remains of beauty. Her hair was always dressed in the old style of simplicity and with peculiar neatness, and no head ever became a crown better than hers. She was of the middle stature, and corpulent ; few women, however, with her corpulence, would have

attained the graceful and dignified carriage for which she was remarked. In private, the good humour and confidence with which she inspired all about her seemed to keep up an unceasing scene of youth, playfulness, and gaiety. Her charming conversation and familiar manners placed all those who were admitted to her dressing-room, or assisted at her toilette, perfectly at ease; but the moment she had put on her gloves to make her appearance in the neighbouring apartments she assumed a very different countenance and deportment. From an agreeable and facetious woman, she appeared all at once the reserved and majestic Empress. Whoever had seen her then for the first time would have found her not below the idea he had previously formed, and would have said, 'This is indeed the Semiramis of the North!' The maxim, *Præsentia minuit famam*, could no more be applied to her than to Frederick the Great. I saw her once or twice a week for ten years, and every time with renewed admiration. . . . She walked slowly and with short steps; her majestic forehead unclouded, her look tranquil, and her eyes often cast on the ground. Her mode of saluting was by a slight inclination of the body, yet not without grace; but the smile she assumed, vanished with the occasion."

Some time before her death Catherine had written her own epitaph by way of jest. It is worded as follows:

"Here lies Catherine II, born in Stettin, 21st April (2nd May) 1729. She came to Russia in 1744 to marry Peter III. Fourteen years of age, she had a threefold object—to please her husband, Elizabeth, and the people. She made use of every possible means in order to succeed. In the course of eighteen years of unhappiness and loneliness she involuntarily read a great many books. On ascending the Russian throne she desired to do good and laboured for the welfare of her subjects, their freedom, and their property. She forgave readily and cherished hatred for nobody. Compassionate, considerate, endowed by nature with a cheerful disposition, republican at heart, and benevolent towards all, she had friends. Work came easy to her, she loved the arts, and liked society."

It was a modest epitaph for a great Empress, who also thought herself a philosopher, to write, but perhaps she was not quite so much of a philosopher as she desired to appear or pretended to

be. After all, she was in the first place a woman, and a very feminine woman, with all the weaknesses of her sex. Were not such speculations a waste of time, it would be easy to surmise how different her life might have been had she been married to a more virile husband and had her lines been cast in more pleasant places. As it was, she made the best of her life, and certainly strove to do her duty.

Not long before her death she wrote to a French emigrant describing her own character : " I never," she said, " ascribed to myself a creative brain. . . . I have always been easily led, for in order to do so it sufficed to advance ideas better and more logical than my own, and then I always became as tractable as a lamb. The reason for this is to be found in my extreme solicitude for the welfare of my realm ; I was so fortunate as to stumble upon good and benevolent principles, to which I am indebted for my great successes. I have also experienced serious reverses, proceeding from mistakes in which I had no part and which may even have been due to a disregard of my instructions. In spite of my natural pliability I knew how to be obstinate or determined (whichever you prefer to call it) when necessary. I never interfered with the opinions of others, but in case of need knew how to maintain my own. I disliked discussions, having become convinced, that everybody always retains his own opinion afterwards ; besides, I do not know how to raise my voice. I was never vindictive, because Providence placed me in such a position that I could not cherish such feelings towards private individuals, and felt that our mutual relations were far too unequal, if regarded fairly. In general I favour justice, but consider that an absolutely strict justice is not just at all, and that, in view of the frailty of mankind, equity is alone applicable. But in all cases I always preferred an attitude of philanthropy and of benevolence towards the human race to severity, for the rigours of the law are too frequently misapplied. This attitude has been prompted by the dictates of my heart, which I believe to be meek and kindly. When my elders enjoined the adoption of severe measures, I would burst into tears and confess my weakness to them, and some of them, also with tears in their eyes, would accept my view. I am of a cheerful and frank disposition, but during my long life I have been made to discover that there are

malignant minds who hate cheerfulness : it is not everybody who can bear truth and sincerity."

This self-drawn portrait of Catherine, written at a time when it was the fashion to be introspective and sentimental about oneself, is after all fairly truthful, nor can it be said to be highly coloured. It is really a very modest and sober picture of a very remarkable personality, who, whatever else people may say, has left her mark not only on the history of her own country, but also on that of the eighteenth century.

Nevertheless we venture to say, that so far posterity has failed to pass a sound judgment on this great stateswoman. In the pages of Masson she is depicted without art, without any attempt at a logical conception of her character and work, simply from the point of view of the hired servant, the *valet-de-chambre*, to whom, if he have the true *valet-de-chambre* mind, nobody is a hero. He mixes the sweets and bitters so indiscriminately that a blurred impression is left, and as he has listened at the keyholes of many doors, and heard the scandals of many Imperial backstairs, he has many tales to tell, and these have been avidly swallowed by a credulous world, always ready to believe the worst, and always pleased when they can hear anything to the detriment of the great. And yet the great are human like ourselves, and have often failings and frailties as great as their lofty qualities and undoubted merits. It does not, however, follow that the slanders and scandalous stories invented by lackeys and dependants, repeated from one to another, and losing nothing in the process, are invariably true and trustworthy.

Catherine was a great character, who by her remarkable gifts filled and retained an exalted position, in which she was constantly endeavouring to benefit her subjects and aggrandize her country, and in which she was equally constantly exposed to the envy, hatred, and malice of her enemies. Let us endeavour to form an impartial idea of this exceptionally gifted woman, and see whether she will bear the test of a calm and dispassionate, if sympathetic, investigation.

We have seen that the beginnings of Catherine's life were scarcely of a kind calculated to develop the more refined and the more elegant side of her nature. The eighteenth century was



THE EMPRESS CATHERINE IN 1794

pre-eminently the century of polite manners and witty sayings, it was a sort of artificial, hot-house century, the century of the salon *par excellence*. Poor little Figgey, however, the ugly duckling who was to grow into so stately an imperial swan, was born in a remote provincial town of a country which was still rude and regarded as semi-barbarous. Her parents, although they had royal blood in their veins, led rather monotonous and sordid lives; her education was the constant subject of ridicule in her own letters in later days. Allowed to run wild in the public gardens of Stettin and play with the children of the worthy townspeople, she could have had but little distinction of manner, and we are told that she was overbearing and domineering with those of her own age and reserved and shy with her seniors.

At the age of fourteen this country bumpkin, ungainly in appearance, attracting but little attention, self-contained and uninteresting, was taken by her vulgar, worldly, and ambitious mother to St. Petersburg, to marry the heir apparent to the throne of All the Russias. By that mother she was regarded as a factor in a formula, a means to that mother's aggrandizement, but in herself of no individual human importance or interest. Yet at that early date there were not wanting prescient and discriminating people who took the trouble to read into her mind and who already pronounced her to be a philosopher. The kind of society she was plunged into we have endeavoured to describe. The husband she married baffles description. We have seen that Alfieri, writing a generation later, thought St. Petersburg resembled an Asiatic camp composed of serried rows of extended hovels inhabited by barbarians masquerading as Europeans. When Catherine first went there the manners of the Court were simply extraordinary. Among such surroundings, the plaything of parties, the object of jealousy and suspicion, made to feel almost immediately that her mother, so far from being a safe guide, was actually a source of danger, this poor little child, for she was scarcely more, thrust entirely upon her own resources, developed and grew into womanhood. It was a hard school, a severe training, for an inexperienced girl. Her home influences do not appear to have amounted to much; in her later letters, though she refers to her teachers and her religious instructors, she is silent about her home. On her husband she could not lean, he lacked

discretion and brains, and leaned on her instead, always trusting to her to help him out of his difficulties. Fortunately she was naturally gay and cheerful, and, instead of being morbid and introspective, looked round upon the world with the bright and laughing eyes of a schoolgirl. Moreover, she was studious; the flatterer who had called her a philosopher had awakened in her a desire to justify the compliment. Besides, she knew that as the wife of the future Emperor of Russia she would be called upon to play an important rôle in the government of the State, more especially as that future Emperor himself betrayed so little fitness for his exalted destiny and was already in the habit of looking to her for advice and assistance. In that corrupt and frivolous Court, surrounded by vice and luxury in their coarsest and least decorous forms, Catherine, the neglected young wife of an ill-mannered cub, instead of emulating the examples which were set her on every side, preferred to study Montesquieu's spirit of the laws, Bayle's dictionary, and similar works, which she did not merely read for the sake of being able to vaunt her cleverness to an unfriendly circle, as so many young ladies have been known to do, but took the trouble to understand. We need not go over the tragic story of the birth of Paul, whose legitimacy by the way, although she cordially disliked him, she never in later years disavowed, and her relegation to neglect and obscurity as soon as she had done her duty and provided an heir to the throne. Treated as a negligible quantity by the Empress Elizabeth, openly neglected by her husband, whose predilection for the unattractive Vorontzoff person was one of the jokes of the time, she consoled herself elsewhere, while her husband, who was fully cognizant of her intrigue, condoned it. We do not wish to justify this lapse from the path of virtue, nor to defend her wrong-doing, we only wish to point out that in thus erring she was by no means an exceptional figure at the Russian Court of that time. Indeed, those were times when marriage vows were not held very sacred in any part of Europe, and least of all in St. Petersburg. Paris had spread the infection of what we specifically call immorality to the extreme limits of the civilized world. In Russia, far from being shocked at Catherine's having a lover, people were mildly surprised that there had been no serious scandal about her before.

The attitude of Peter, the gradual development of the famous

Vorontzoff intrigue, the plot, which Catherine discovered, to divorce her after his accession, place her in a convent, and marry the mistress, naturally awakened the instinct of self-preservation and all the fighting qualities of the descendant of a long line of soldiers. People, like matter, choose the line of least resistance, and the example of Elizabeth seemed to Catherine the easiest, the most natural, perhaps the only one, to follow. At that critical moment there turned up the right man. Orloff seemed to have been specially created for her purpose. Having once crossed the rubicon, and being separated from her elegant, sentimental, but perhaps somewhat effeminate Polish lover, what wonder that she should have fallen in love with the splendid guardsman, whose reckless courage in the field was only equalled by his haughty insolence in the *salon*, and whose conquests of the hearts of others, and declared passion for her, must have appealed equally strongly to the feminine heart of the imperial blue-stocking. It was a romantic, a scandalous, a mad intrigue, but there can be but little doubt that to Orloff Catherine gave all her woman's heart. This was a man, a strong man, a brave man, gorgeous to look at, entrancing to listen to, impulsive, self-assertive, in a word, virile. The picture of him which his contemporaries have handed down to us is not on the whole unpleasing; he was certainly dissolute and unprincipled, as were indeed most of his comrades, but he was at least a kind-hearted, unassuming, manly fellow, against whom no man seems to have had a word to say. We have seen how these two, the charming, refined Catherine, the handsome and robust Orloff, between them saved the Empire from falling to pieces in the feeble hands of the foolish but obstinate Peter III. That she had no hand in the murder of her husband has now been incontestably proved by Russian historians, and is generally admitted. On her accession she immediately proceeded to devote herself to the promotion of the good of her country. There can be little doubt but that this noble-spirited woman, accustomed to an open-air life, undermined her constitution by her prolonged sedentary labours in the interests of the empire she had undertaken to govern. Had she listened only to the dictates of her heart she would probably have married the soldier of fortune to whose co-operation she owed her crown. But wiser counsels prevailed. Later, the faithlessness and open licentious-

ness of Orloff wore out her patience. Nevertheless, Orloff does not appear to have been an utterly abandoned character, for we have seen that in the end his volatile affections were at last definitely chained to a charming young lady who predeceased him.

It is with the appearance of Potemkin on the scene that a decided change for the worse comes over the character of Catherine. This impudent adventurer duped and fooled and studied to corrupt her. At his instigation and with the object to keep her amused, favourite succeeded favourite in a monotonous variety. Yet this constant change in the object of her affections was not caused by her caprice or fickleness, but rather by the inconstant characters of the men, mostly worthless and contemptible, whom Potimkin selected for her and threw in her way. To us at this distance of time there is something outrageously scandalous in the brazen and cynical frankness with which the position of favourite was, as it were, officially recognized. Masson, who was paid by Napoleon for political reasons to malign the dead Sovereign whose bread he had eaten, of course gave full prominence to all the regrettable features of these relations. But to Catherine's Russian contemporaries there was nothing new and nothing particularly disgusting in all this. The Empress Elizabeth, her predecessor, had led just as openly scandalous a life, and yet she was universally loved and revered by her subjects. The Empress Anne, the Empress Catherine I, all had had their recognized favourites, and though two blacks do not make a white, the practice had, as it were, been sanctioned by custom. In those licentious times every ruler was almost expected to have a mistress *en titre* besides his legitimate wife, and what was considered permissible in a King or Emperor might well be excusable in an Empress. Besides, there was a certain political prudence and expediency in thus officially recognizing the favourite. By such recognition the Empress was spared the importunities of intriguing adventurers of the stamp of Potemkin, in which the Russian Court abounded. In the case of Orloff, Catherine could not help himself, she was compelled to manifest her gratitude by public recognition. One extenuating circumstance may be pleaded in her favour. She was no destroyer of homes, she did not wreck the domestic happiness of her subjects. Her favourites had no other ties, and it must be conceded to her credit that

whenever she suspected them of a desire to contract such ties she freed them from any obligation to herself, and even aided in the promotion of their happiness. It was very different with the male rulers of neighbouring countries, who generally married their paramours to compliant husbands.

From her letters, in which she revealed herself so frankly, we can see that Catherine was of an affectionate rather than a licentious disposition.

Turning to the other sides of her character, we find that in spite of her many defects, her childish vanity, her tiresome love of rather silly and pointless jesting, she had many good traits, and was of a generous and kindly disposition, always ready to help those who were in distress, fond of good actions, and charitable towards her fellow-creatures. She was remarkably free from hatred and malice, cherished ill-will to nobody, and took a broad, genial, and grand view of life.

With these characteristics, more masculine perhaps than feminine, she combined a truly womanly diligence. She managed the affairs of her country with the watchful solicitude of a German *hausfrau*, rising early and working late, committing many errors, as who does not? but giving the best of herself to the service of the State, with a devotion and singleness of purpose which, in one situated as she was, is deserving of hearty and unstinted admiration. She was never self-indulgent, but always untiringly devoted to her duty. 7

Her detractors have accused her of insincerity, have maintained that her lofty sentiments and benevolent reforms were but intended as a blind, that they were but a sham, a sort of hypocrisy, wherewith to conceal the heartless selfishness of an ambitious tyrant. Surely this is both unfair and untrue. That Catherine did not accomplish as much as she desired was not peculiar to herself. The majority of human workers must make a similar confession. If she was wise enough not to plunge her country into revolution, but was content to sow the seeds of reform,—seeds which bore abundant fruit under the reigns of her two grandsons,—this is surely no just cause for reproach. What must be admitted, and what Russian historians claim for her, is that she carried on and perpetuated the movement to which Peter the Great had given the impulse, but which his

immediate successors did nothing to promote, the europeanization of Russia. Whether that europeanization was an unmixed blessing has been questioned, but, thanks to it, Russia has been able to join the comity of nations, and take her place in their councils.

Catherine knew that the progress of a nation was not purely a material problem, she saw clearly that civilization and advancement were dependent on intelligence and culture, and throughout her reign she was at constant war with ignorance and the powers of darkness. She did much to promote education, more especially that of women, whose intellectual standard she raised enormously, and she was indefatigable in her endeavours to attract the brightest minds to her country, in encouraging literature, science, and the arts, and in creating a taste for refinement and elegance amongst the gross and carnal, though good-natured and affectionate, people she was called upon to govern.

Her greatest difficulty indeed was to find amongst the coarse and self-indulgent nobles, accustomed by centuries of sloth to a life of indolence and pleasure, suitable men to carry out her ideas, and more particularly to understand them. It was this difficulty, which met her at every turn, that hampered her in her movements, often prevented her from doing what she wanted, and made her appear in a false light to the superficial foreigner.

Take, for instance, the reproach to which she has been frequently exposed, of practising cruelties whilst preaching humanity. Russian historians, who are far from partisans and who regard Catherine and all she stands for with disapproval, nevertheless confidently affirm that she cannot be held responsible for the cruelties which were so often practised in her name, and of which she was unaware. She was, thus, most anxious to abolish question by torture, and actually did so by Imperial decree, but she had constantly the greatest difficulty in restraining her Ministers and subordinates from having recourse to it. These worthy barbarians could not be brought to understand her new-fangled ideas. To them torture was the only means of extracting evidence from recalcitrant witnesses. We read that even at the present day there exists among the lower native police officials of India a similar state of mind, notwithstanding the indisputably humane intentions of that empire's rulers.

Many of the alleged contradictions and insincerities of Catherine's administration will be found on examination to have their cause, not in the Machiavellian duplicity of the Empress, but in the ignorance and unenlightenment of her administrators. There seems little doubt that, especially during the period of Potemkin's ascendancy, who by the way did not add cruelty to his other vices, there existed an organized conspiracy to keep Catherine in the dark concerning a number of matters which she would never have tolerated had she known about them.

Most biographers of Catherine, even the most careful and profound, have divided her reign into two periods—a period of progress and prosperity, and a period of reaction and depression. While this is in the main correct, it must not be assumed that Catherine in later years turned her back on those principles of humanity which she had so ardently espoused in her youth, or that the impoverishment of the country which followed on the Turkish and Swedish Wars is attributable to her reactionary measures. It was not until Paul ascended the throne that the people began to know what reaction and tyranny really were, yet under his peaceful reign the country prospered and was able under Alexander I to astonish the world by its powers of recuperation.

The fact of the matter is that the people of Russia, especially in the eighteenth century, were not governed at all, not as we understand government to-day at least. The bulk of the population was agricultural, and the agricultural population were serfs, owned by the landed gentry. This gave an elasticity to the revenues of the State of which we to-day can have no conception. The few local officials distributed about the country would appear to have had on the whole rather an easy time. But wars were always disastrous. By depleting the country of its population, the gentry were denuded of hands, and agriculture of necessity suffered.

The outbreak of the French Revolution showed Catherine, who, as we have seen, was never a disciple of Rousseau, the importance of strong government, and the danger of allowing the ignorant and unenlightened forces of darkness to step out of their bounds and inundate civilized society. Destruction seemed the inevitable result, and so Catherine, while she still adhered to her old beliefs, determined that in her country, so

much more backward than France, such possibilities should be guarded against. She had seen in her own realm how dangerous and devastating a popular rising could become,—indeed nurses still frighten children with the name of Pougatcheff to-day,—and she therefore frowned on all manifestations which she considered as of a revolutionary nature, indeed even the courtly poet, Dyerjavin, came under her ban. Very different was the frankly brutal attitude of Paul, with whom there was only one remedy for the cure of all political ills, namely, the stick. If Catherine was no disciple of Rousseau neither was she irreligious; yet to her broad mind the intolerance of Lutheran Protestantism was always repugnant, nor was she ever much of a stickler for creeds and dogmas; she thought the crown of Russia well worth a Greek Orthodox Mass.

Taken for all in all, however, the effect of Catherine's reign was beneficent. She left behind her traditions of culture, dignity, refinement, and nobility, which were perpetuated. The period of her reign is still described in Russian literature as "Catherine's time," the time when arts and letters flourished, when manners were softened, when the minds of the educated classes were freed from the grip of superstition, and when Russian thought first dared to put forth its shoots and to come out into an inhospitable world. It was the early spring-time of intellectual and economic life, the foretaste of a great future and a noble national destiny. An erring, frail, imperfect woman, with many faults and vices, Catherine was nevertheless possessed of a grand and lofty conception of the duties of the throne, a great, warm, human heart, a wide-embracing, imaginative, imperial brain, and a marvellous power of hard, plodding work. She left behind her an influence which is still felt, and in taking our leave of her, while we regret the blemishes in an otherwise noble character, we are compelled to express our admiration.

INDEX

- ALEXANDER, Catherine's intentions regarding, 310
- Alexandra, Grand-Duchess, 287
- Anhalt-Zerbst, Prince Christian Augustus, 2, 43, 47
- Princess Johanna Elizabeth of, dismissed, 74
- Princess Sophia, 1. See also Catherine II
- Anne of Courland, Empress, 18 ; death of, 22
- daughter of Catherine, Duchess of Mecklenburg, 21
- Duchess of Holstein-Gottorp, 17
- Empress of Russia, hatred of Peter III, 7
- Anthony Ulrick, Prince of Brunswick-Bevern, 21, 24, 215
- Apraxin, Field-Marshal, 127, 131
- Bertin, Rose, 310
- Bestoujeff-Ryounin, 37, 44, 46, 83, 131, 164
- Betzkoj, 1, 65
- Biren, von, 18, 21, 22
- recalled from exile, 225
- Brockdorff, Mme. and Peter III, 57, 58
- Browne, General, 245
- Brümmer, dismissal of, 89
- education of Peter III, 56
- gives Catherine books, 5
- letter of invitation to Russia, 8 ; second letter, 36
- Buffoons of Anne, 20, 22
- Byzantine Empire, dreams of reviving, 233, 271
- Cardel, Mlle, French governess of Catherine II, 4, 6
- Catherine, daughter of Peter I, 21
- Catherine I, 16
- Catherine II, accession of, 161
- administrative measures and reforms, 177-191
- arrival in Moscow, 36
- arrival at St. Petersburg, 13
- betrothal of, 49
- Catherine II, birth of, 2
- blue and silver brocade story, 41
- captivates the Russian people, 147
- character of, 321
- childhood of, 1
- coronation of, 171
- death of, 320
- denounced by Peter, 131
- dinner with, described by Dimsdale, 240
- disgrace of, 82
- early difficulties of, 135
- education of, 3
- extravagance of, 51
- father (reputed) of, 1
- Frederick II of Prussia, visit to, 5
- French governess of, 4
- grandchildren, 312 ; instructions to, 315
- impression made by, on arrival, 39
- inoculated against small-pox, 244
- insulted at dinner, 149
- journey to Russia, 9
- Kaiserlinde* planted by, in Stettin, 5
- Kieff, visit to, 51
- learns Russian and falls ill, 40
- literary activity, 291-305
- marriage of, 67
- consent asked to, 43, 46
- intrigues against, 44
- moral torture of, 93
- mother of, 1, 36, 74, 77
- Oranienbaum, life of, at, 100
- Peter III, first meeting with, 4
- marriage between first mooted, 8
- probation of, 36
- reception by Elizabeth, 36
- received by Peter, 36
- religion, change of, 46
- riding lessons of, 43
- riding, pleasure taken by, in, 102
- rules of conduct for, 83
- traditions, 332
- Troitz Monastery, visit of, to, 44
- tutors of, 4
- wedding procession, 72

- Charlotte of (Brunswick) Wolfenbüttel, 48
 Constantine, 314
 Constitution, Catherine's reply to petition for a, 191
 Corbri, Bishop of, 5
 Courland, 225
 Court of St. Petersburg, 16, 96
 Dashkoff, Princess, 139
 Diderot, 291, 297
 Dimsdale, Baron, 237
 Discomforts of Russian life, 96
 Dolgorouki family, 17
 Domostroy, 34
 Dove, Pastor, 5
 Effreinoff, 91, 95
 Elizabeth, 16, 17, 26
 Empress of Russia, accession of, 6
 affianced husband of, 2
 convivial intimate dinner of, and Peter's peep-holes, 80
 coup d'état, 28
 death of, 144-45
 decree regulating state to be observed by nobles at marriage ceremony, 69
 description of, 30
 lovers of, 2, 28, 32
 overtures to, of Princess Anhalt-Zerbst, 7
 reception of Catherine, 36
 reputed marriage of, 32, 200
 supper with "comrades," 78
 Felton lends £10,000 to Catherine, 153
 Figgey, 3. See also Catherine II
 Financial elasticity of Russia, 68, 331
 Foreign policy, 225, 279
 Foundling Hospitals, 190
 Frederick II, Catherine first sees, 5;
 last sees, 11
 father, reputed, of Catherine II, 1
 letter announcing his desire to promote union of Catherine and Peter III, 8
 Frederick William II, 280
 George III, 279
 German colonies, 179
 Gordon, description of Catherine I, 17
 Government of Russia, methods of, 165
 Greek Church, 47, 147
 Grimm, F. M., 292
 Gustavus III, 281
 Gustavus IV, 287, 318
 Gyllenborg, Count, his opinion of Catherine II, 5, 53
 Herzen and authenticity of Memoirs, 113
 Holstein-Gottorp, Prince, Adolphus Frederick, 56
 Charles Augustus of, 2
 Duke Frederick of, 17
 Prince John Louis of, 5
 Henry, Prince, of Prussia, 234, 309
 Ice-palace wedding, 20
 Ismailoff, General, 156
 Italian opera introduced by Locatelli, 32
 Ivan VI (or III), 22, 211
 Ivan, step-brother of Peter I, 18
 Jones, Paul, 286.
 Joseph II, 270, 283
Kaiserlinde planted in Stettin, 5
 Korsakoff, 274
 Kosheleff, Mlle, 94
 Kruse, Mme, 95
 Labour troubles, 181
 Lacey, Peter, 19, 24
 La Harpe, 315
 Lamsdorff, Count, 317
 Lanskoj, 275
 Lapoukhine, Mme, 43.
 Laws, codification of, 191
 Leopold II, 286
 Lestocq, 29, 36, 40, 44, 49, 90
 stratagem with glove and letter, 77
 Liscewska, Anna Rosina, her famous portrait, 5
 Lomonossoff, 302
 Louis XV to marry Elizabeth, 28
 Lover's language of Catherine and Peter, 45
 Lübeck, Prince, Bishop of, 4, 17
 Lynar, Connt, 25
 Mellin, Countess, her description of Catherine II as a child, 3
 Memoirs, authenticity of, 113
 Mengden, Julia, 25
 Menshikoff, 16
 Mirovitch, 216
 Momonoff, 275
 Municipalities, 188
 Münnich, 19, 24
 National Assembly under Anne, 19
 Nicholas I, 317
 Nobles, emancipation of, 187
 Orloff, Alexis, 210
 family, 152, 192
 Gregory, appears in St. Petersburg, 133
 career of, 192
 Ostermann, 19

- Panin, 137
 Imperial Council proposed by, 169
 Paul, birth of, 102
 continental tour of, 310
 early training, 245, 306
 exclusion of, from succession, 310
 inoculated for small-pox, 245
 married life, 307
 parentage, theories about his, 108-116
 Perry, Captain, description of torture.
 See note to p. 92
 Peter I, 16
 boat of, ceremony of parading, 73
 Peter II, 17
 Peter III, abdication of, 156, 162
 accession of, 145
 birth and education, 55
 Catherine's first meeting with, 4
 chicken-pox contracted by, 52
 consummation of marriage, 78, 106
 death of, 157-160
 declared heir to Russian throne, 7
 deposition of, 152
 dissatisfaction with, 147
 dogs of, 100
 fever and chill caught by, 79
 Greek Church, attitude towards, 147
 illness of, before marriage, 67
 marionettes of, 80
 peace with Prussia ratified, 149
 scene with Catherine's mother, 50
 small-pox developed by, 52
 Peter, Grand-Duke, receives Catherine, 36
 Poland, 225
 Poniatovski, Count Stanislaus, 117-131
 Potemkin, 265
 Pougatcheff rising, 250
 Prinzen, Baroness von, description of
 Catherine II as child, 6
 Rasoumovsky, Alexis, 32, 80, 200
 Cyril, 94
 Reinbeck, Countess of, 8, 12
 Revolution in Russian social life, 34
 Rivière, de la, 299
 Rondeau, Lady, 21
 Roumyantzeff, Countess, 42, 51, 54
 Rousseau, J.-J., 302
 Rulhière, Claude de, 298
 Russian family life before Peter I, 33
 St. Petersburg, description of, 301.
 Sacromozo, 85
 Shouvaloff party at Elizabeth's Court, 38
 Small-pox, inoculation against, 237
 Soltikoff, 104-114
 Sophia, Princess. See Catherine II of
 Württemberg, 309
 Statesmen, dearth of, 183
 Stehling, 59
 Sumarokoff, 303
 Sweden, 281
 Tarakanoff, Princess, 210
 Tcherkanoff, Baron, 38, 239
 Tchernitcheff brothers, the, 90
 Tchoglokooff, Mme, 87, 94
 Terem, 34
 Todorsky, 41, 47
 Torture. See note to p. 92
 Turkey, 229
 Valinsky, 23
 Viazemsky, Prince, 181
 Villebois, Peter the Great's character
 as described by, 16
 Vladislavova, 95
 Voltaire, 292
 Vorontzoff, Count, 38, 140
 Elizabeth, 125, 153
 Wagner, tutor of Catherine II, 4
 Williams, Sir Charles Hanbury, 119, 127
 Wolff, Baron, 128
 Yermoloff, 275
 Zavadovsky, 274
 Zinovieff, Mlle, 208
 Zoritch, 274
 Zuboff, Platon, 276

Printed by
MORRISON & GIBB LIMITED
Edinburgh

